THE DUEL OF THE QUEENS

THE DUEL OF THE QUEENS

A Romance of Mary, Queen of Scotland

by

E. BARRINGTON

Author of

"The Exquisite Perdita"

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney

acc. no: 112

First published - - September, 1930
Second Impression - September, 1930

823
A33D

Printed in Great Britain

PREFACE

IT has pleased the poets and romancers who have written of the loveliest and most loved of royal women to represent Mary Stuart as one overwhelmed with sexual passion, swept into murder and adultery, and counting them as nothing but an inevitable means to her end. That she must gain it also at the cost of her fair fame, her son, her kingdom, and what she could not but count as the loss of her immortal soul does not weigh with these romancers and historians for a moment. To support this, Bothwell must be transfigured into the strong and silent lover, passion to the red heart's core, a Lancelot of Scotland, and Mary into a siren with fairy's face and tail of fiend. They did not need however to embellish the romance nor to take bygone historians as Mignet and the eulogists of Elizabeth for their guides. State papers, the private letters of Elizabeth's statesmen, the interchanges of the Scotsmen and their tools whose business it was to ruin Mary for their own ends, are safer ones, and in this romance I present the truth as I have found it in these dark places and tortuous windings, and have rather drawn upon Mary's enemies than her friends for the truth.

Such as I have found it I give it, knowing no pen can reproduce the matchless charm that won the world's heart then and has held it since. In many parts of my book she and others speak in their own words, and all the letters are authentic though slightly modernized and occasionally shortened.

E. BARRINGTON.

Japan.

PART I

THE DUEL OF THE QUEENS

CHAPTER I

"SHE is the greatest lady in the world," said George Buchanan, tutor in Latin to the young Queen of Scotland soon to be Queen of France.

"She is the loveliest lady in all the world," responded Ronsard, poet of beautiful women and all lovely things. "I have heard her French Majesty, Queen Catherine, declare: 'That little Scots whipper-snapper of a queen has only to smile to turn the heads of all my good Frenchmen. It is a folly, but so it is!'"

"If Her Majesty made that remark the whole world may swear it is true. For there is no love lost——"

"S-sh!" said the Bishop of Orkney with a discreet finger on narrow lips. "Her French Majesty has been a loving mother to our little Queen ever since her own French mother sent her to France from Scotland, a hunted baby fleeing from the Scots lords in English pay. But, gentlemen, you commend her for beauty and rank. Now, I who am a Churchman, commend her for wits and learning. She is the most brilliant little lady for her young years in all the world."

They looked a little doubtful on that, these gentlemen gathered in the embrasure of one of the stately windows of Fontainebleau. All can understand that beauty sways mankind like a moon serene above climbing waves. All, that rank is a sceptre apart from beauty's, and independent. Both united are omnipotence. Master George Buchanan was extremely susceptible to the latter. Ronsard the young poet was the passionate, the fanatic poet of beauty. All day he would sit in the rose-wreathed alleys of the garden to catch a glimpse of the tall young maid

walking with her Maries, laughing softly, telling her little secrets softly among them—too young as yet to be conscious of her terrible power; unripe—an apple tree in sweet white blossom under blue skies.

But who could admire learning in a budding beauty? Venus and Minerva have never assorted well and the owl has no affection for the dove.

They stared a little contemptuously at the Scots Bishop as he spoke with the gravity of a man of God. He had however come as one of the Scots Commission to arrange her marriage with the Dauphin, the future King of France, and was to be respected.

"Mother of Christ! my lord, what should she do with learning?" said Ronsard. "Set wrinkles between her velvet brows and dull her sweet eyes and put an edge to her exquisite smile? No, by God! Leave learning to ladies who have nothing else to recommend them."

Another gentleman intervened—a man broad-browed, with strange piercing eyes, eagle-faced and ironic. He wore a doublet of purple velvet laced with silver, warm against the chilly spring winds. Brantôme, the keen-eyed historian of that gay and wicked court.

"My Lord Bishop speaks well. This lady, as I would have you know, gentlemen, is unrivalled in every quality. She is a lordly jewel, cut and polished in every facet. It may be enough for a lesser lady to be a beauty, and indeed it is much. I own it. And it is dominance if a lady be Queen of France and Scotland like this one. All knees indeed must bow, for she will shape the world to her pleasure. But there is more. Should not such a beauty and such a Queen have wisdom for her guide?"

"Not if wisdom blights charm," put in Ronsard sharply. "It is the law of beauty to be beautiful, and that is more than queendoms. We ask no more. Our cup brims. Wisdom is not for this girl. Rather a divine folly——"

"You forget, gentlemen," said Brantôme gravely, "that she is to be no toy for a husband's pleasure but the greatest lady of all. She will crown our Dauphin King of Scotland on her marriage day. She is also in her own right Queen of Scotland and England, for the old harridan Mary, now on that throne, is not only bastard by her father and Parliament's will but is incapable of children, and her sister

Elizabeth in the same plight both ways. There is no king in the world can match Her Majesty, though marrying our heir, she will be second to him in France. Such a princess must not be ignorant of the world she rules."

"Rehearse her gifts!" said the Bishop smiling. "We have some reason to be proud of our little Scots Queen."

Brantôme threw himself into an oratorical attitude with the bust of Cicero for a background.

"Since one day I shall pen her glorious history, I speak. When that unequalled princess was fourteen she spoke and understood Latin perfectly. You, gentlemen, were not present, but these ears heard her address the King of France in a Latin speech on the intellect of women and the hills of learning they may climb if they choose to use their pretty feet."

Ronsard laughed mischievously.

"The little lovely *mignonne!* She has a rare memory, and it is not for nothing that the learned Master George Buchanan is her tutor!"

"Allow me!" interposed the sour-faced Buchanan. "It is true I corrected a word or so. No more. The girl was a prodigy of wits. A critic might object that it was not Latin of the best period, but she reads Latin like a scholar. And so do the barren Elizabeth of England and her shrivelled sister Queen Mary. With royal women it is the fashion nowadays to be learned."

Brantôme turned to his supporter.

"Well, Messire Ronsard, I, like you, took her for a pigeon, disgorging with exquisite grace the stuff which Master Buchanan had crammed down her young throat, and I went apart to Antoine Fochain and said: 'Sound the pretty one on some learned subject. Speak in Latin! Take her at a disadvantage. It will do her no harm, for if she falters she will win all hearts with her lovely hesitation. This girl is a winner of hearts, do what she will.' And Antoine, whose learning has blinded him to every beam of beauty, addressed her on—Guess!"

"Love—," said Ronsard. "What else? The arrows in her own quiver? The girdle of Venus?"

Brantôme smiled dryly.

"By no means. You little know! Antoine is a chip of dry wood. He took her as a young arrogant scholar that

must be made to know his place. He said (but in Latin): 'Most learned young lady, what is your opinion on the science of rhetoric?' I own the court tittered as far as it dared. Even the King smiled and Madame Diane de Poitiers beside him giggled aloud. *That* lady would not have been sorry to see the young Queen abashed! Gentlemen, she stood forth bright and clear as a dewy rose at dawn, and in her voice of crystal replied—in Latin always: 'Your Majesty, lords and ladies, and learned Master Fochain bear with me while I say I do not respect the science of rhetoric. It is a woman's weapon for it can make the worse appear the better reason by its false ornaments. It is a flatterer, a false guide, misleader of men's senses that love to be misled. No. Give me plain words eloquent in truth and justice only, and let those who will play with the false Circe while I woo the Goddess of Clear Wisdom and few words!' Enchanting! In thought the whole court kissed her! Sure none but a French girl could be so ready! Her mother, a French princess, has given her ready wit in spite of a Scots father!"

"Her poetry certainly comes from us. She writes verses honey-sweet," said Ronsard with dreaming eyes. He would have given much to have heard what Brantôme described. That was the quick flash in her that could never be at a disadvantage, swift as summer lightning in the night, but below that lay what won him more—her passion for lovely words, for the music of them stringing on thought like pearls on gold—for the wistfulness that lay beneath and spoke of the deep waters of the heart, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet. These quenched in him the deepest thirst with which a poet's heart can burn, the yearning for perfect sympathy. No one hung on his words like this royal girl, no one dwelt on a phrase nor worshipped the achievement like *la Reinette d'Écosse*. Small wonder he loved her. Who did not?

There was a slight commotion outside and clear cries of mirth. The four gentlemen crowded into the window each with a mullioned pane to himself.

Below on the green lawn was the girl they had been discussing. She was playing ball with her four Maries, five happy Scots girls, darting, dipping like swallows in flight, stooping like lapwings to catch it as it sped along the grass.

Most unlike the stately decorum of the French princesses this one wore her skirts ankle-short, and ran until her face flushed and her dark chestnut locks fell over her eyes, and she tossed them back with her hands and panted through laughter, and leaped like a boy at the ball when Mary Seton flung it to Mary Fleming and took her chance with the rest whether she missed or got it, and finally flung herself on the grass, sitting and clasping her knees after she had flung a rose instead of the ball in Mary Seton's laughing face. They sat close about her talking eagerly, heads together, as girls will.

"You beauty! You beauty!" muttered Ronsard, leaning breathless from the window, and did not know he had spoken aloud. He loved her as Venus incarnate, not as a woman. Flowers and incense for the altar! Love of men for the burnt offering! That was the way with her now—a maid apart. He knew she was to go to men's heads like a madness of the Gods driving them to crimes and follies unheard of. And this, her power, she was never to understand all her life long, because she meant so well and had no thought of triumph. Now, pure maid, she charmed like a bed of lilies hidden in green leaves, exhaling clean loveliness and perfume fresh as dawn—surely a mortal delight that earth can grow such a blossom for God's pleasure.

She was then fifteen, tall, though she had not reached the stateliness of her height, slender as a willow-wand, and the thin silken folds falling about her showed her long limbs like running water. She was bare-headed, for it was a frolic for the Scots young folk to play thus carelessly in the gardens, and therefore the later afternoon sun found her unguarded from his kisses and illustrated her face in gold.

No man living, or what is more to the point, no woman could fault her. She had the sensitively shaped features of the true ruler of hearts. Her face was exquisitely pale, and she knew her business too well to use the fards and rouges which clogged the skins of the French court beauties,—it was the transparence of blood seen through pearls. Men were to vow later that when she drank red wine it flushed her throat. "A lily among thorns," said Ronsard. Be that as it might, this pallor set off her singularly long brown

eyes darkened with curled lashes, and set under lovely brows to match the hair—which was perhaps her chief beauty. For there, gold of her Scots father brushed the black of her French mother, and they blended into darkness that gave lights of red amber when sunlight burnished the waves. We come to her mouth, sweet and most sweet, love's own rose, not to be described otherwise, for no man who loved it (and they were many) but attempted a description after his own heart, and indeed, as Madame Diane de Poitiers (the King's madame) observed, it was all things to all men, though in no case after her Goddesship's meaning.

She wore her hair simply parted on the brow, and rolled back in two shining waves making a frame for the pale face, where all beauty sat promising that more yet was to come of it. This was truth, for the charm that sways not only men but women grew in her daily, giving her the world for her lover and history for her slave. That could not as yet be foreseen in its fullness. But the Scots lass was known already as the most royal maid in all the world by nature as by birth. She would certainly play a great part. No sparkling beauty, but young laughter mixed as yet with a girl's timidity when taken unawares.

She sat among her Maries: Mary Beton, reserved and stiff with much dignity and much ambition to prop it, a proud brunette in spite of youth. Mary Livingstone, a milky blonde with flaxen Scots locks curled in the mode, and eyes blue as forget-me-nots in shadow; Mary Seton, truest of them all, brown-haired and hazel-eyed, with a tender heart shining in those eyes as she looked at her Queen. And Mary Fleming, red-haired and green-eyed, the most spirited of the band and the hardest to keep in charity with all men—a noble spitfire if she let herself go as she did often enough. These girls of high blood made much of the romance of the Queen's little court, and stories of the hearts laid at their young feet and the great matches preparing for them were current all over France, Scotland and England—these charming guardians of the beauty of the Mary of Maries, who superseded all need for stiff duennas! She was fated to this. Romance attended her as her slave from the cradle to the grave, and nothing happened to her as it did to others, but always with some shining unexpected

drama and *fanfare* that made men hold their breaths and marvel.

The gentlemen at the window saw the group increase. A party of men came up through the green alleys and joined the girls, and all rose ceremoniously to their feet for heading the men was Francis, Dauphin of France and future king—a tall pale boy with hollow wistful eyes fixed on his young love so soon to be his wife. He could not take them off her, and that was not singular, for men and women alike watched her, hoping to turn some new page in the book of love in deciphering the secret of effortless charm. She laughed and talked with him, trying to strike sunshine into his wistfulness on such a day of June.

"He should not have her!" said Ronsard between his teeth. "He is unripe. He has no knowledge to taste the flavours of her sweetness. She needs a man and a strong one to rule that wild kingdom of hers and to teach her the innermost meanings of love. She will be a woman before he is a man and *then*——"

Ronsard was privileged. He might criticize even royalty, but the Bishop smiled superior.

"Thrones marry thrones, monsieur the poet! If our Queen does not marry your King it must be some great Englishman who shares her Tudor and Plantagenet blood. Remember she is Queen of England now, if right had its own, and all the Catholics grant it, and many Englishmen besides."

"Englishmen—*pouf*!" said Ronsard with scorn. "They are never lovers. They are pedigrees, policies, treaties. Good fighters for all three, but—lovers—never! Give her a lover or she must find one!"

He turned away and the Bishop shrugged his shoulders. He was of opinion that riches and rank should be a sufficient guarantee for any woman's chastity, and the future King of France a good enough match in any case even for the beauty of all time. His only concern was that such terms should be made as would strengthen Scotland and give her the full fruition of the alliance. And indeed the conditions fluttered all the statesmen of Europe.

Reams of parchment rose like walls about the little Queen. Should she bear a son he must rule all the realms. If daughters, Scotland claimed the eldest for her Queen, and

so forth. Men who had not seen her thought of her only as a pledge, a treaty to be turned to account. Men who had —but that must wait.

Horses were called for, and she ran in with her girls, the pages legging it to keep up with them. She returned in riding-dress and plumed hat, and mounting her Arab galloped off, leaving a trail of laughter, to the green woods of Fontainebleau with her following of youth and gaiety. The Frenchmen at the window dreamed of inevitable triumph, for she inspired such dreams in all but those whose veins ran ink, who wielded no weapons but pens.

"But truly she makes politics even more dangerous," said the voice of a man who had come up behind them. "A princess of such royalty should be ugly, dull, stupid, to have her affairs conducted with any sanity. She will drive herself and her ministers mad with her wine of beauty, and be a world's wonder in more ways than one. Remember Helen and Guinevere! How can Venus usefully hold any but a sceptre of flowers? It is the most preposterous situation! She wants her doves and roses and they give her treaties and protocols. Heaven help us all! She will set Europe aflame."

He was a young man, handsome as Narcissus. Another poet, Chastelard, of whom more later. He and Ronsard sang her in verse that still lives. But the Bishop was extremely angry with both.

"Sir, you will find that the Commissioners of the Queen of Scots who have come from Scotland to arrange the terms of her marriage, are extremely sane persons and know the value of their Sovereign Lady, and therefore——"

"No one could know her value unless he loved her for life and death and eternity, my lord Bishop. She is no mere woman. She is Beauty, Royalty, Love. She is all that each means. She is a light that will burn in the world's eyes and dazzle them while words live and history lasts. She is a world's bane or blessing. She——"

The Bishop looked with smiling pity at the young man's flushed face and shining eyes.

"She is a very handsome girl," the Bishop said, "and Queen of Scotland. And these rhapsodies are very exceedingly out of place. She should be spoken of respectfully and not like a naked goddess!"

That was the trouble. The men who loved her, and they were legion, could never remember that she was Queen of Scotland. The fire of her loveliness consumed her royalty. And the men who did not love her thought of her only as Queen of Scotland, and cared nothing that she had a heart to break and a woman's life to live. Between them it was likely enough that they would ruin her one way or another.

In the forest of Fontainebleau the pair rode softly together, the others having fallen behind to give them the chance of a word, these lovers on the eve of marriage. He rode so near that his foot brushed her stirrup.

"*Marie, ma mie, ma bien aimée*, are you glad that it will be so soon?"

"Glad, my heart!" she answered, leaning a little towards him. She had the instinct to lean and conciliate always where she trusted, and also the instinct to trust where she should not. A woman indeed!

"I do not like all the pomp and bustle," he said nervously. "It is enough to break lovers' hearts who would have their joy to themselves. Love should be secret."

"But we are great princes!" she said with astonished eyes. "How can it be otherwise? We are a picture for the people—a poem. In us they see all their wants and hopes expressed in beauty. I would not disappoint them for the world—No, not I! I will be beautiful that day if never again."

"You can never be anything else, but—but look at me! Am *I* anyone's want and hope? Lean, long-legged as a crane, hollow in the cheek, dull of eye, I shall make a poor show beside the grace of my princess. You should have chosen better, my heart's love."

"I have chosen—but we neither of us could choose!" she said. "France and Scotland must wed. Though we had hated each other, that must have been. It was lucky our hearts went with it. Do not fear, Francis. When the time comes for the great ceremony in Notre-Dame you will remember nothing but our love and what the people long to see, and you will be France. What could be more wonderful?"

But the boy looked down with tears that she must not see in his eyes. His weak health impeded him at every

turn, and he saw the cruel keen gaze of his evil mother Catherine dei Medicis watching it, and greedily calculating her long regency over her second son Charles, a boy of nine who must succeed him if he died and left no son. She had no love for Francis. Such a wife as Mary Stuart would be his Queen and ruler as well as Queen of France. But if he died—and there was no promise of long life about him—then she herself would reign over the boy Charles and gain her heart's desire. Her black Italian eyes narrowed and glittered with a cat's expectation of cream. Two lives only stood between her and her hopes—her husband's, Henry King of France, who was besotted on the fair Diane de Poitiers, and this Francis the Dauphin, lover of Mary Stuart. Well—Fate had been good to her—the mere daughter of great Italian bankers yet Queen of France. It might be better yet. She could be passive awhile.

The two rode a little way in silence—their followers far-off bright spots of colour down the long green glade, and as they passed a bed of pale anemones Mary leaned towards them.

"They remind me of Scotland. They grew in the little island of Inchmahome where they kept me guarded from the English. In those days I shuddered if the English were named. They began to torment me—so soon. King Henry the Eighth, my great-uncle, was the ogre of my dreams."

"Tell me, *ma mie*!" said Francis, drawing so near that he brushed her saddle. "You talk so little of those days. Had you orders for silence from Madame your mother?"

"Yes, orders, my heart. She does not think it well to disparage the English whom I must rule one day. But O—their cruelties!"

There was a catch in her breath like a sob; he pressed nearer and took her disengaged hand in his. She slipped off her riding gauntlet, and it lay cold and white as a snow-flake.

"Tell me!" he pleaded. "They have let me hear so little!"

"No good luck to tell. I killed my father. After the battle of Solway Moss when the English conquered us, his one hope, his one prayer was for a son to gather Scotland up again in soldier's fashion. And when they brought him

word that I was born in Linlithgow he cried aloud so that they could hear his heart-strings crack, and he groaned out—'It came with a lass and it will go with a lass!' He meant Scotland, my heart, which a princess you know not brought for her dowry, and he believed it would slip from my hand, and so cried, 'Alas!' It may. God knows! Two or three days afterwards he died. I had killed him."

She stopped with a fated look later to be stamped upon her descendants. Her eyes explored the green solitudes for peace. She found at all events courage—she never lacked for that—and went on.

"And then my brute of a great-uncle, the Eighth Henry of England, claimed my little body for his puny son Edward. He thought to get Scotland that way. But the Scots and my mother would not; not they! They sent their ambassador from England, and he said: 'Give us the little Queen and we will bring her up royally in England and the realms shall be one.' But my mother said: 'Yes, as when the wolf has swallowed the lamb. One indeed! Tell me—if ours were the lad and yours the lass, would you ask it? No. You would not have our lad for King of England, and we refuse yours for King of Scotland. The child is ours and here she stays!'"

"I like that well!" said Francis laughing, as she stopped for breath with sparkling eyes. "How did he take it?"

"He said a cruel thing, my heart. He said: 'A bairn's life is a slender thread. They say your lass is a sickly thing not like to live.'"

The Dauphin frowned. "The brute! But Englishmen are like that. They should have flogged him from the castle gate."

She laughed proudly. "My mother did better. She swept her chair about, and it had hid my cradle and me. And she caught me naked to her lap and held me up mother-naked to the Englishman, and she said: 'My girl will live when your sickly boy rots in Westminster, and she shall be Queen of more than Scotland. Go, tell this to your Master that would have her to kill as he has slaughtered his wives.'"

The pale young Dauphin meditated, and chilled her; she

was too young to make allowance for his ill-health that made him slow and dull in kindling. The fire in her own face died but she went on, pouting a little at his lassitude.

"So then they had to send me to France, for the English would have harried all Scotland to find me and but for this we had never met, my heart."

Francis leaned forward and kissed her hand tenderly.

"There I bless the butchers, *ma mie*. How beautiful you are when you tell your story. Shall we stop and gather anemones? Let us wait till your girls come."

Vaguely she guessed that this was a shy boy's love and no man's. But she knew no other, being a bud sheathed in cool green from the sun. They waited, and the Maries rode up with their ardent cavaliers, eyes wooing, hot hands seeking; and the silence of the woods rang to their joy, and old unhappy far-off things were forgotten in the coming marriage and its pomps.

What a wedding—what a bride! What a queen for bridal glory! Queens Consort must kneel to their husbands for a crown, but this maid would crown hers. As a baby the crown was held on her head, her hand took the sceptre, the sword of state was girt about her middle like a king's. Already the English leopards were borne upon her shield—and why not—she whose great-grandfather was the Seventh Henry of England? Who was the bastard Elizabeth, daughter of a mere slut of an Anne Boleyn, to stand in her way? What but triumph could await her when the breath left the harried body of Bloody Mary of England? The English would repudiate the Protestant bastard Elizabeth; and Mary of Scotland and France be called to reign over a united island!

Did she believe it? Did life even then hold out such brilliant promise? Difficult to say. She had a strain of melancholy in her sweetness which fed itself on dreams and previsions of which she did not speak. There had not been much in her childhood to give her faith in joy; her mother—steadily guarding her throne in Scotland from English intrigues—she had seen but once since she sailed, a child of six from black Dumbarton, escaping the hawking English ships with difficulty on the way. Would life be always like that? Promise and doubtful fulfilment? No,

she could not think it. Queens have queens' luck. Her great marriage was a shout of triumph in the world's face—not promise but proudest fulfilment, a defiance to English plotting, a challenge to all human obedience.

CHAPTER II

IT was on the last saint's day before the marriage that the Queen Catherine of France paid the very youthful bride the honour of a visit in her private apartment in the palace of the Louvre. So rare—so unexpected was it—that as Mary met her at the door her heart beat with quick expectation, and the more so as Her Majesty desired the ladies in attendance to remove themselves out of earshot. Two armchairs of equal splendour were placed for the two Queens—for much of the etiquette of the French court centred upon armchairs as opposed to lowlier seats. A bronze perfume-burner was set on the table before them, and footstools for their silk-shod feet.

And then with a lip-smile intended to inspire confidence Queen Catherine began : " In a few days, my child, you will be my true daughter, and your own good mother—the Regent of Scotland—not being able to leave your stormy kingdom it is needful that I should take her place in giving you instructions. This I will do and in return claim a daughter's and a queen's promise. Shall I have it ? "

Mary in silence looked up at the tall imposing figure in glorious red damask, strings of pearls littering the bosom and stressing the sallow Italian skin and masterful jaw. The dark eyes above them were as piercing as heart-hiding —an overmatch for a child's. She was assured of her answer before it was spoken, yet when it came it was unexpected.

Mary spoke gently : " Madame, my very good mother, I desire your best counsel, for who has more need ? And your instructions I receive with reverence. But a Queen cannot promise before she hears, for she pledges her kingdom with her."

There was no sign of anger or surprise on the yellowish marble of Catherine's face. She smiled slightly and went on : " I wish to speak of England—of which you are rightful

Queen at this moment, and must actually be one day. The whole policy of Europe, and I may say of the world, turns on England now, for Asia is nothing nor is the New World except to Spain who holds it in her pocket. Now—what is your own thought of England? You are the great-granddaughter of Henry the Seventh, the great-niece of the atrocious Henry the Eighth—that butcher of noble ladies and renegade to Holy Church. Therefore, royal English blood is yours. But you are also half French. Your mother, Mary of Lorraine is one of us. Does not nature itself point out your office?"

In much surprise and more anxiety Mary tried to clear her thoughts and words, and the Queen continued to look at her with calm expectance. When the answer came her voice trembled a little in replying, but there was no other sign of emotion and no delay.

"Madame, Your Majesty knows that England has been a nightmare to me as to my father and mother, and France I love. How could I not? I came here a little child to peace and safety from the plottings and persecutions. I never heard the word 'England' spoken but it meant dismay and horror. But there is a country Your Majesty has forgotten. I am Queen of Scotland and in my heart the Scots are first for ever. If I hope to be Queen of England it is because it will mean peace for Scotland, and an end of the plotting and fighting that bleed my country to death."

Catherine permitted no disapproval to appear. She had thought French interests would come first with the girl who owed so much to France and would be her Queen. With herself French interests came first for the simple reason that they were her own and her family's interests also, and that would have been the preferable view for Mary Stuart. What was a barren country like Scotland but a stepping-stone to the wealth and power of England?

But she said sedately: "A Queen should feel in that way, my daughter. We are the shepherds of our people. However, what I would have you know is that in Europe at this moment the two most important women are yourself and Elizabeth of England. No others are worth mentioning in comparison, and therefore——"

Mary ventured to interrupt.

"But, Madame, Queen Mary, her half-sister, has kept her

prisoner in the Tower of London and now guards her in the country, and the next courier may bring word that her head has fallen. How is she important? I do not speak of myself."

The French Queen's lips lifted with scorn:

"The old hag on the English throne though a very good Catholic and a very dull fool dares not kill her. She has friends. And the old hag, hated by her husband Philip of Spain, and incapable of children, will be dead in two years or less. And then—it will be you, my daughter, or Elizabeth, for the English throne."

"Then it should be me," Mary cried with spirit, "for I am of the true blood, and my great-uncle Henry himself bastardised his two daughters, and with his Parliament declared them incapable of succession. I come next. He knew it, and that was why he would have married me to his puny son Edward who died."

Indeed this child's hand had been plotted for by France and England when her life could be counted in days. It would be so plotted for to the end of her life. But Catherine shook her head.

"True, my daughter, you are Queen of England as you sit, and so do those half-sisters hate one another that, you being a good Catholic, the old hag would sooner have you for her heir than the slut Elizabeth, daughter of the slut Anne Boleyn who had ruined Mary's own virtuous mother, your great-uncle's first wife. But though bastardised Mary reigns, and Elizabeth though bastardised may reign also instead of you if we are not careful. We make what trouble we can for her and yet——"

There was a long silence. Then Mary raised her head.

"Madame, my good mother, was Anne Boleyn guilty, when they beheaded her for adultery and incest as treason to my uncle Henry?"

"You ask a difficult question, my good daughter. She was certainly guilty of a very coarse levity with men, and should have had better manners having been trained at our court. But also she was guilty of standing in the way of a woman your great-uncle wished to marry after he had tired of Anne, and told her she should have no more boys by him. Also she did not affirm her innocence on the scaffold. But I believe her to have been guilty for one

special reason, because of the coarse levity of her daughter Elizabeth. It runs in the blood. You cannot mistake women of that temper."

"Madame, may I hear the rights of that story? My mother has not dared commit it to paper—our ships are so often captured by the English. And my *gouvernante*, Madame Parois, said a little and threw up her hands to God and all the saints. What has Elizabeth Tudor done? Has she disgraced herself with men?"

The French Queen's black eyes sparkled, and a malicious laugh showed her teeth. She slipped into her own Italian speech which Mary spoke perfectly.

"Very different are the two sisters. Mary Tudor is an old maid, though married and dreaming pregnancies until Europe laughs at her empty cradle. But she will soon be dead. Elizabeth, my good daughter, is nine years older than yourself. This you know. Perhaps you do not know that at fifteen her conduct with the handsome Lord Admiral of England—Seymour, husband of her stepmother Katherine Parr, was so—shall we say—merry?—that all England believed she had had a child by him, and she was obliged to deny it roundly in a letter to the Privy Council."

Mary Stuart blushed rose-red. A wave of crimson ran over her fair face. She had thought of Elizabeth Tudor as a girl like herself, and though she could love no Tudor this outraged all royalty and therefore her own.

"Was her denial true?"

"It was quite certainly true—and for an excellent reason. Like her half-sister she is incapable of children. We have it on authority we cannot doubt. But she is *folle* for admiration, mad for the pursuit of men, and like her mother will go to any length for them—*c'est une grande amoureuse!*—but I question whether she will marry, for with no children the husband must be master, especially if he outlives her. She will romp with men as she did with Seymour, who lost his head as the price of her pleasure. She will flatter them, try to tickle their senses, lead them to think they have caught her, and then as the butterfly-net swoops over her head, dance off to the other end of the garden and draw on another to the same futile pursuit."

There was another pause. Presently Mary asked: "And what is this light lady like? O, I have seen her miniature

flattered with a skin of rose and pearl, and hair like sunbeams, and a Diana air in the carriage of her head and modest eyes! But what is the slut like when Truth measures her praise?"

Catherine needed little sensitiveness to feel the disgust in the voice of Mary Stuart, and it pleased her well. It could never suit the aims of France that there should be friendship between the two Queens of the island of Britain, and besides that it was well known that Elizabeth, true daughter of Henry the Eighth, was deep in dissimulation and could betray with a kiss any day. No safe friend for a girl inclined to believe in fair faces!

Therefore she replied smartly: "Here among ourselves we call her the half-virgin—and I believe that to be a flattery. Her conduct with the rake Seymour was incredible. For her looks: she is a passable height. Her hair inclines to red—on the yellow side. Her face is pale, her lips small and red. The nose hooked. She has a carriage of great dignity and majesty when she happens to remember her father—a carriage very much the reverse when men are for her hunting; then she resembles the cat who was changed into a princess. The mice scurry and she is among them with claws and teeth in a second, and nothing else is remembered unless indeed it be her mother's amusements. She is extremely clever and shrewd and well educated, and thinks herself much more so than she is. As for instance she counts herself a perfect mistress of French, and yet makes such blunders that our ambassadors laugh in their gold sleeves. Very woman of very woman and therefore most dangerous for a Queen."

She waited a minute for an answer and Mary said sighing: "She cannot be outwitted,"—more as an assertion than a question.

Catherine replied with a grim out-furl of her fan. "She is as keen-witted as Machiavelli whom she has made her study. There I do not blame her. It is the policy of Kings."

With another long sigh Mary said—as if to herself: "And yet—if she could trust me we might be friends. It is what I would choose—for England; I may be Queen there—for Scotland where I am Queen. We are women—we have the same blood. We——"

Then indeed the French Queen cut in with most bitter laughter : " Friends ! And you are her heir and nine years younger and lovely as a fairy-tale, and of unblemished reputation and of royal blood on both sides and—is there anything in which you do not goad and shame her ? Nothing, by God's Mother ! And you would trust her ! Let me assure Your Majesty that the day you trust the English slut you sign your death-warrant and your country's. She cannot but hate you. I should hate you myself if I were she. Any rival must. Be not a fool. You have the game in your own hand. In a few days you will be not only Queen of Scotland but Dauphiness of France. Later, Queen of France also. You will have four kingdoms to share among your children if you count Ireland. This brings me to the promise I have a right to ask. It is this. Promise me that in all your dealings with England until you are seated on that throne you will consult the interests of France, and take counsel with us. Promise that when Queen of England you will be our true and faithful ally. Otherwise what use has France for you ? "

Mary of Scotland rose to her feet and laid a hand like a white rose-petal on the velvet of her chair.

" Madame, I thank your good Majesty for much good counsel. I hope all my life long to be true to France and to England. I have no other thought in my whole body. This I swear to God and Our Lady. But I am Queen of Scotland, and I cannot pledge her alliance without my ministers, and if I am Queen of England it is the same. How can I pledge alliances in private talk with my mother ? No. Trust my heart, Madame, for it beats true French. And if I say I would be friends with Elizabeth I must test her, but I think it cannot be. I hate false red-haired women that must hunt men."

In the last sentence the Queen so obviously was eclipsed by the young disgust of the girl whose rôle would always be to elude men rather than chase them, that Catherine smiling inwardly set herself to gain her point. She heaped the brutalities of the court where Elizabeth had had her training upon the little Queen. Some were true some false, but all would serve their turn. She bade her remember that but two barren wombs were between her and the English crown, and entreated her to pledge herself now to

France, the only ally she could trust. But though she could create disgust for Elizabeth and distaste for a heretical country like England, she could wring no pledge from the Queen of Scots, and they parted with anger on her side, and a belief on Mary Stuart's that her cousin Elizabeth might have suffered a little unjustly at the hands of a lady whose interest it clearly was to disparage her.

"I shall watch with as many eyes as a peacock. I shall walk as gingerly as on spring ice. I am no fool! But I will see for myself. My cousin is my cousin though a bastard, and it does not please me altogether that the daughter of an Italian banker should call any kin of mine sluts and bitches and red-haired witches! There is much good in human nature—and may be in hers."

She went back slowly to the great room where her Maries were chattering of wedding finery and all the pomps of royalty, and sat among them sighing. A world where royalty has things very little its own way. She wondered what Elizabeth, the prisoner of the Tower, had heard of her. Yet Catherine of France was right. Undoubtedly the planets of these two were in opposition of the sharpest, and the fierce duel of terror and beauty in which they were to struggle for power was the inevitable outcome.

For the moment Mary had tried to forget these anxieties for lesser ones. The great preparations for her marriage absorbed her and filled her girl's heart for the most part, though at moments a hidden fear would lift its head. All fears should bend to a bride's joy and a queen's will, but they would not.

"It is hard," she said to Mary Beton, who knelt before her displaying jewels, "that my Scots lords will not allow the crown and sceptre of Scotland to leave Edinburgh. I would have borne them so gladly on my marriage day, for I love Scotland. They should have come in spite of the dangers of English ships. They should have moved heaven and earth to bring them to me."

"But that would have been too great a danger, your Grace," said Mary Beton seriously. "Your head would not have rested on your pillow if you had thought of the crown in the hands of the English. And what you will wear is glorious. You will look like an image of the Blessed Virgin all mailed in jewels, crowned and sceptred, and

nothing wanting but the child in your dear arms, and that will come later."

"God grant it! But I think the comparison profane. I am well enough for an earthly queen, but nothing more. And the Queen of Heaven is beauty immaculate and divine. One should not say such words."

She crossed herself devoutly. Young as she was her Maries could have told the world that she had not a little of the visionary's temper, not a little of the mystic's yearning. Fate was against her there, but her mother remembered a scene when thwarted and care-worn the child had said: "Put me out of the way. They wrangle about me and I am weary of it all. Send me to the convent at Soissons, and there with birds and flowers and prayers and the good sisters I can live my life, and bid the world forget me."

Her mother, sharply hurt, had answered: "A fine reward for all my care in ruling your unruly kingdom! Think rather that you shall marry a great king and have noble children, and you and they be defenders and warriors of the great Apostolic and Catholic Faith. A high destiny. Prayers can be mixed with power. You shall not forget your daily prayers and the Mass—but you shall reign."

She did not plead again for a convent. But she had seizures of strange thought, in which the world shrank to the size of a wizened walnut filled with black dust in comparison with things unseen winged and haloed like angels.

That mood was on her now as she looked at the table loaded with jewels, her own property and the gifts of her French relations, and such courtiers as those whose positions gave them the honour of presenting them. Beautiful exceedingly but with no promise of peace in their glitter. Those angry diamonds came from her store in Edinburgh Castle. They glittered as coldly and fiercely as the eyes of the Scots nobles who opposed her right in the Northern Kingdom—men bought with England's money, and sworn to make her reign a short and bitter one. Those rubies burnt with a sullen blaze which recalled the flaming fanatical zeal of John Knox and the Scots Reformers sworn to break the Catholicism in her, or to break her with it and fling both into the dust-heap of the ages. Those moonbeam strings of pearls were the tears she would weep in

that cold and gloomy kingdom of the North, far from the sunny land of France and all the joys of her glad childhood and youth. Those emeralds, baleful with the green fire of jealousy, might stand for the cat-like glaring eyes of the Leopards of England crouched for the spring—seemingly passive for the moment, but tense with steady watchfulness. Were they passive even now ?

She spoke aloud suddenly : " It is bad luck—I say it is bad luck to carry the arms of England on my shield until I am Queen of England. I never liked it. They should not force me. Take away the jewels. I have other things to think of."

Mary Beton raised astonished dark eyebrows.

" But, Your Grace, who should bear the arms of England but the great-granddaughter of Henry the Seventh, and the great-niece of King Harry the Eighth ? Half the blood in your veins is royal English blood. Are you to forget it ? That wrinkled old woman on the English throne—who has no right there—*she* may object ! But need you care ? "

" It is not the old Queen of England I care for. As you say she is a bastard and the throne is mine. It is the English people. True, they send messages, but—oh let me not think of it now. Let me be free from care for a day, an hour."

There was prayer in her eyes—a young plea for joy. A prayer to the unrelenting brows of Fate.

" Think of this, Madam ! " said Mary Beton. " Here is the marriage poem that Master George Buchanan has written for Your Grace. In Latin, of course, but with a loveliest translation. It will go all over the world ! An address to his Royal Highness the Dauphin."

She was but a girl. Pleasure lighted in her face as she snatched the paper and began reading it aloud.

> If matchless beauty may your fancy move
> Behold a princess worthy of your love,
> How gloriously her stateliness doth rise
> What gentle lightning flashes from her eyes.

" Beautiful ! Beautiful ! " cried the Maries in concert, " Oh, go on, Madam, go on."

Mary, laughing, pushed the illuminated paper into the hands of Mary Seton.

"How can I read my own praises! You read best, Mary Seton. A few more lines and then I must see my wedding-dress."

Mary Seton rose and declaimed it with waving hand. She read with sweetness and fire, still addressing the bridegroom.

Are you ambitious of an ancient line
  Where heralds make chivalric blazons shine?
She can a hundred monarchs count and more
  Whose hands the English, Scottish, sceptres bore.

"I like that. It is right to speak of England. That should never be forgotten!" Mary Beton said proudly. "For myself I shall never know a satisfied day until I see my Queen throned in Windsor by the Thames."

The Maries loved her as a sister. Brought up together from earliest childhood there could never be the distance prescribed for queens between them and their mistress. The frank Scots manners forbade it also. Mary laughed at her zeal and the clapping hands of the rest.

"Go on, flatterer!" she said to Mary Seton. "Shall I not have enough with the two crowns of France and Scotland?"

Mary Beton laughed too. It seemed weight enough for so young a head, but not enough to satisfy her pride in her Queen.

"Never mind. That can wait. I like these verses. Go on, Mary Seton!" she said.

That passion which with infancy began
  Took firmer root as you advanced to man.
Your own fond eyes the peerless maid surveyed
  A constant witness what she did and said.
Your passion never sprang from wealth or State
  But from her virtues nobly proud and great.
Features divine, no coldly pictured grace,
  But shining conquering beauty in her face.

"I like that, Mary Stuart!" said Mary Seton inter-

rupting herself, for sometimes among themselves they called the girl-queen so. "It is true. You are all life and shining. For my part I think Ronsard's verses too cold and set. And as to the pictures!—I believe I could paint a better myself!"

"Try, little Scots owl! And now—finish. Hurry, for I must see the dress."

"Miles more!" said Mary Seton running her eyes over the pages. "O just this bit—addressed to Your Grace."

And let no fond regrets disturb your mind,
  Your country and your mother left behind.
For one awaits you, dear beyond the rest,
  Smiles on his lips and rapture in his breast;
And he will be to you all else above
  A kingdom's or a mother's sacred love.

She laid down the manuscript, and Mary took it lost in thought. Yes—she loved him as a young brother. They had grown up together. There was nothing to discover for she had known every turn of his temperament since childhood. She knew exactly where she must support and supplement his shyness and awkward self-contempt. She must inspire him with the confidence needed for his great position. She must be King of France as well as Queen of Scotland when he succeeded to his father's great honours. A difficult position for a girl not sixteen, but possible because she knew him so well, and loved him so tenderly. Her eyes softened over those lines. Naturally Buchanan had written them as to a mighty prince who would be his bride's stay and shield. He would never be that—never! She almost smiled in thinking of the grotesqueness of the notion as compared with truth. But it might—it might be dear and sweet and homely between them, for all that! She would do her best and he would trust her.

The Maries sat about her still as statues, waiting until the cloud of dreams should lift from her eyes. They loved her too well to misread such thoughts as those, for they too knew the bridegroom and knew that the Queen of Scotland must rule for both, and that would be no easy task in the teeth of Queen Catherine of France.

None who saw it could ever forget the glory of that April marriage day, an April bright and blossoming like the young promise of the royal bride. Paris the lovely, the City of Festivals, had excelled herself in magnificent preparation for the joy of the child she had adopted as her own, and this was but the sign and seal of that unwritten covenant. The King, conscious of her popularity, had made it possible for the humblest to see and rejoice with the Royal House, and all was planned to that end. A long gallery, twelve feet from the ground, had been built from the palace of the Archbishop of Paris to the great cathedral gates of Notre-Dame, ending in an open pavilion where the marriage would be solemnized in the face of the world, before the bride and bridegroom proceeded to the high altar for the marriage blessing.

The very thought drove Paris mad with delight. They were not to be defrauded of one blush, one smile, one note of her clear voice as she took the vows which bound her to them for ever. Beauty wins all hearts, but perhaps the purposes of the French are more swayed by it than others, and not a man in the vast surging breathless crowd but had a thrill of the bridegroom's joy.

Such a gallery! Embowered in carven vine leaves and branches, shaped like the cloister of a great cathedral. Such a pavilion, hung with blue Cyprus silk, blossoming with golden fleurs-de-lis! Such a Cardinal to make the marriage, splendid in crimson against the blue, the Cardinal de Bourbon, a Prince of the Church and of the Blood Royal!

"Sad that her poor mother cannot see it!" murmured the women in the crowd. "Hard that she is nailed to that gloomy throne in Scotland and cannot come to our darling's triumph! I would give my little finger if she could lead the child to the altar. The poor Queen-Mother!"

The men nodded assent. Hard indeed! Life is not all easy for those great people. She would miss her mother—a fine woman and brave! Hush, a man has climbed a few feet upon the gallery so that he stands above the crowd. What is he saying—what shouting aloud?

"Happy beyond all men is the Prince who is to be wedded to this Pearl. If Scotland is of value, she, the Queen is far more precious, for if she were a beggar-maid, in her person,

ACC-NO: 112

in her divine beauty, she would be worth all the kingdoms of the world. And since she is a sovereign she brings to France and to her husband double fortune!"

It was Chastelard, the poet. He shouted the words, wild with triumph, tossing his velvet cap into the air. Men took them up and roared them from one to another and farther. And to the accompaniment of that mighty music of a people's joy the bride appeared led by the King of France. Let the old chronicler describe her splendour.

"She was dressed in a robe whiter than the lily, but so glorious in its fashion that it would be impossible for any pen to describe it. Her royal mantle and train were of bluish-grey cut velvet richly embroidered with white silk and pearls. It was of a most marvellous length, its weight supported by young ladies."

Not for her young beauty the purples and crimsons of older royalties. She drifted among them, unveiled indeed as royal brides must be, but evanescent in her grey and white as an April dawn. She desired no jewels, but that was impossible; therefore on her head she wore a crown-royal ablaze with splendour, and about the white stem of her neck long chains of noble gems sustaining that matchless cluster of stones known in England as "The Great Harry," and once the possession of her great-grandfather Henry the Seventh through whom she claimed the English throne.

"Not that. Not to-day!" she had pleaded to Queen Catherine who had supervised her adornment. "Let me forget that quarrel to-day. This once!"

"To-day of all days you shall wear it," the Queen said sternly. "England is a part of the dowry you bring to France. Let the English know it and the French rejoice!"

And therefore with every breath she drew, The Great Harry sparkled her rights to all men in flaming colour. The crowd waited still as a sea in sunshine while she advanced to the pavilion. Not a sound must interrupt the words which made her bride of France. It was done, and still the silence held while she turned to the bridegroom who kissed her on the lips.

"Monseigneur, I salute Your Majesty as King of Scotland."

That was the bride's gift—her triumph—and as the Scots

Commissioners knelt before them, the sea broke into the storm and billows and thunders of acclaim. What a bride—what a bride for France! And to that thunderous music they moved into the mighty church, the sea-roar of the great organ meeting the other like opposing waves and heralding her approach.

Paris rejoiced that day as never yet. Such as were admitted to behold the festival in the Louvre spoke of it as enchantment impossible to forget.

After the banquet, there followed in the great hall of the palace a pageant said to have been designed by Mary herself, and indeed it had the touch of her delicate fancy.

The floor-cloth was painted in imitation of blue sea-waves, and as the Court, headed by the Queens, stood at gaze, six ships with silver masts and sails of silver gauze entered before a prosperous breeze, gliding smoothly over the painted waves—a lovely pageant. On the deck of each sat a prince masked and in cloth of gold sewn with jewels. And as the fleet passed before the crowding ladies each Prince leaped from his deck and made a capture for the vacant seat beside his, the Dauphin seizing his bride. And thus, doubly loaded with youth and beauty, the happy ships glided round the great hall, while outside brilliant lights blazed the triumph to Paris—until all dissolved in dancing and delight—not only in the palace but all over the city and in the country of France.

Was it flawless triumph for the bride who had raised her husband to the rank of King? No. She carried an anxious heart weighted with a thing known to her, known also to the French King and to Catherine. The astrologers anxiously consulting the bridegroom's horoscope had shaken their heads very gravely over it. Stormy planets had shadowed the eclipse under which he was born, and darkened his boyhood. Consulted as to the alliance with the Queen of Scotland they had again gloomed but this time in silence.

"Not even their wish to flatter us, and they would do it if they could, can hide the fact that the stars are against us, my heart's hope!" he said to his bride, as they stood alone at last in the royal chamber where the marriage bed awaited them. "Think well, before we go further. They have

said—I heard them say it—that my ill-fortune is infectious. It casts its shadow on those nearest, whom I best love. Think well. Be only my sister, heart's dearest, and you may yet escape. You have long life and triumph before you. I have not."

She looked, and her eyes filled with tears seeing the thin neck, brightly flushed cheeks and feverish eyes. Better for her, for him, if each had been given more years for ripening, but these children could have no privileges of youth. They were crowned slaves fettered to a political necessity.

"Would you have waited longer if you could, Francis?" she whispered trembling. "We are so young. I am afraid."

"I too," he said. "Yes, I would have waited until I was a man able to guard and guide you. They drive us on. I saw the English Ambassador's eye to-day on the jewel you wore, and on the English arms on your great coach. I knew he would write to that withered old woman at Windsor. Not that she matters—she will soon be dead. But they drive too hard—too fast."

"That is true. I have said it!" Mary answered in a low voice of fear.

Holding hands they were sitting on a low couch in the great room now lit with silver lamps burning perfumed oil. Dim splendour surrounded them, but ghosts of ancient fears and hates looked through it like a dying moon in clouds. In a moment she collected herself—rallying to her duty as Queen of Scotland and Queen to be of France.

"We cannot wait, beloved. We are young, but time will not wait. My kingdom and yours cry out for a son; England also. We are not our own—not even each other's. They drive us—but not they. It is our destiny."

He put his arms about her, and leaned his head on her slight young bosom. She felt two hot tears roll into it, tears of nervous excitement and fear.

Outside was the roar of Paris, drunk with lights and colour, rejoicing in the marriage of this Dauphin, jesting, boasting; but slowly and in awe, hand in hand, the bridal pair approached their marriage bed as an altar of fear.

Next day the Ambassador of the Queen of England laid an angry complaint before the French King from his

Mistress against the assumption of the Royal Arms of England by the Queen of Scotland.

"For it has been brought to our royal notice that in Scotland is circulated a very scandalous verse as followeth:

> The arms of Mary, Queen-Dauphiness of France,
> The noblest Lady in Earth to advance,
> Of Scotland Queen, of England also,
> And Ireland as well. God has provided so.

A thing not to be endured by the reigning Queen of England, as Your Majesty may well perceive."

It was the first formal gun of a conflict which was to carry blood and desolation with it.

This was not told to Mary. They would spare her for a few short days, and she was busied in distributing the special gift prepared for the Scots nobles and ladies who had graced her marriage. One of these survives in a noble house—a priceless treasure.

It is a locket containing portraits of herself and Francis, so fixed that when closed her face rests on his bosom. It is of filigree gold, set with a wreath of pearls, and forget-me-nots in bluest turquoise. That and a medal with the double portraits were given to the loyal Scots who came crowding into the palace to receive both from their Mistress.

After the charming scene the Princess Marguerite of France sat down to write to the mother, who was so far away in Scotland from the pride and triumph :

> "The Queen of Scotland your daughter is so much improved in everything that I am driven to write and tell you of the virtues she has acquired since you have seen her. You may imagine the delight it is to the King and Queen and all her relations to see her what she is. As for me, Madame, I esteem Monseigneur the Dauphin very happy in having such a wife."

It brought a moment's joy to that very lonely and sorely tried mother now drawing near the end of her labours. She may have shivered however in reading, knowing from bitter experience the weight of the hatred of England. But she had not long to bear her chain, heavy, though of gold. Two

years later she was to welcome rest, though with the grievous thought that never again would her eyes behold the fair face of the child for whom she had suffered as few women suffer. Her travail had not ended at birth. Only Death the Breaker of Fetters could end her pangs.

CHAPTER III

A FEW months after the glories of the French marriage the withered Mary of England was at rest in Westminster Abbey, and Elizabeth, with a lioness spring, on the throne. Not a stroke to strike, not a head to fall, she sat there secure. Choking with wrath through which struggled most unwilling admiration, Queen Catherine bemoaned herself to the French King her husband.

"Could mortal believe it? She, bastardised by her father Henry the Eighth and his parliament, her reputation spotted, her purse none too full—no sorceress to win hearts. Jesus! What a world! But she deserved it. The woman is a born actress, and there is nothing so vital for royal women. Hear what she said on entering the Tower where she had so long been prisoner. Magnificent!"

She picked up the despatch from the French ambassador and read aloud, and indeed what she read had splendour.

> "Then entering the Tower of London she thus majestically addressed those who surrounded her. 'Some have fallen from being princes of this land to be prisoners in this place. I am raised from being prisoner in this place to be prince of this land. *That* fall was a work of God's justice. This advancement is a work of His mercy. As the one was to teach patience so I must bear myself thankfully to God and mercifully to men for the other.' And fell on her knees and prayed, comparing herself to Daniel in the lions' den."

"And I would to Our Lady they had ate her bones and flesh, for now we have a great woman to deal with!"

So spoke the Queen of France. The King more accessible to other considerations answered comfortably.

"Good, I own. But *we* have the beauty and the rightful heir. We shall match her yet!"

"We shall match her, never!" his Queen answered in a fine flame of wrath and fear, furling her fan with a rattle like musketry. "And for why? Because a woman who is not repulsive to look at, who can say the right thing always, who is as fearless in affronting her conscience as she is in facing death and the devil, and who can play men like fish, will win every game against a beauty like ours whose eyes and smiles seduce all men to madness, and who has too many scruples to use them as she should when they are mad for her. Also, this Mary weeps when she should swear. I would change our beauty for the red-headed English witch to-morrow if I could, and with her we should conquer the world."

"Pity then that you married our son Francis to Mary Stuart," said Henry edging towards the door. It was indeed his hour for riding with Madame Diane de Poitiers.

"A very great pity!" his Catherine answered grimly. "Had I had the wit to see what is in this Elizabeth I would have waited, childless as she will be! Our cream-faced beauty has a duel to face in which I for one will not stake our interests too far to second her."

The King smiled indifferently.

"There is always the hope that Elizabeth will play the fool with men. Fire and tow make conflagration."

"The cold water of self-interest will always be at hand to extinguish it," retorted the Queen, and went off to send a formal compliment of condolence to Mary her daughter-in-law on the death of her cousin Mary of England.

Mary Stuart needed no instruction as to the loss she had sustained by this triumphant accession of Elizabeth to the English throne. She sat amazed. All the obstacles her own friends had reckoned over so eagerly were gloriously surmounted, and the new and radiant Queen of England confronted her. Twenty-five years old, in the full blossom of such looks as would have been allowed handsome in a private woman and could be glorified in a queen, full of keen intellect and purpose, ready to march with whatever party was strongest, and to conciliate the other with infinite tact, she was the very woman for the dangerous moment in England. A great achievement already. She

had conquered in one blow her father's policy and her sister's, her illegitimacy, the hatred of the Catholics, and sat firmly on the throne, a Queen to enlist the sympathy of all sensible men by her patriotic firm policy. The strong aggressive hand was felt at once in France. Mary Stuart and her advisers knew they faced a new and anxious crisis—for with England it was always a crisis for herself and Scotland.

"But let us begin with courtesy," said the Scots Queen earnestly to the Council held to consider the new English Sovereign. Girl of sixteen as she was the air vibrated with intuition. It cried: "Danger! Danger!"

She looked at the letter before her—the first following that announcing the accession of Elizabeth. A haughty demand for the restoration of Calais to the English! Calais—the long-lost jewel of the French crown! The discussion which followed took place before Elizabeth's envoys who had crossed the Channel to settle the matter, and Mary and her bridegroom sat in State as King and Queen of Scotland to hear. The French bristled at the demand and she saw it—the tiger looks, the clenching of hands on sword-hilts! That the bastard of England should dare! Cold premonition ran through her. She too had her observers at the English Court, and they had not failed to observe the consummate art with which Elizabeth had steered through all perils to the throne. Merciless, they called her, where her own interests were concerned—a most shrewd young woman, with courage and resolution enough to conquer the world if her Englishmen backed her—as they would if they saw her successful. Romance would not fuddle *their* heads!

Mary, holding a morsel of embroidery in her hand at which she stitched with lowered eyelids, listening to the storm, suddenly flung it on the table and raised her head with a flush on her face. Silence. The young Queen will speak! The English envoys in especial straightened to close attention. This was the girl who might, who must, be their Queen, if only to escape civil war in England when the breath was out of Elizabeth's body. Instinctively they longed to hear her, that they might compare the minds of the two as they had already done their bodies. Elizabeth was a handsome enough, audacious, bold young woman,

all energy, pride and rule. This surely was a soft-eyed darling, a winner of hearts, one to gain her way as surely as Elizabeth but by different methods. All sex, whether she would or no, whereas the other—they were not sure in England as yet whether she had any sex either of body or mind—unless for memories of her handsome Seymour!

The Scots Queen spoke sitting, in a voice sweet as a dove's note in the pause of a storm.

"Your Majesties, my lords and gentlemen, I beseech you to consider this matter calmly; not indeed as men who would yield an inch of France to another Sovereign, but with the courtesy that suits our dealings with a great Queen. The Queen of England is my cousin and good sister. I and my husband the King desire peace with her of all things, and to preserve it is our prayer. I ask you, gentlemen, (she turned to the English) to inform her Grace of England that such is our earnest desire. She has sent special envoys to us ourself and our husband, and by these we shall send our hearts as well as our understanding."

As she ended there was silence. The Englishmen seeing her face and hearing her words smiled a little, involuntarily—a smile Elizabeth would have grudged to her rival, for it was that of the profound interest of sexual appreciation of a young and lovely woman's charm. She bent her head again over her work, and made no sign when argument grew fierce and strong, and one fierce Frenchman rising above the others and regardless of royalty shouted aloud amidst applause which almost drowned his shout.

"Surrender Calais, yes! Willingly. But it must be to her who is rightful Queen of England, Mary, Queen of Scotland, wife of our Dauphin and future Queen of France. Let it be to her, and Calais will surrender to right-royal and beauty beyond all words."

The English stood at bay, hard and cold as their island rocks. They laughed with pride. Hands on sword-hilts they left the palace, streaming out disorderly, and would hear no more. Mary, left alone with Francis, flushed like a red rose with anger. She shook her little fist in the air.

"I own the demand for Calais was a maddening insult, my heart, but surely we should match cunning with cunning, and I must win the hearts of these Englishmen if ever I am

to reign in England. When we are King and Queen of France let us practise every art to win them. It is the only —the only way! Your people were fools this day. Surely one can refuse with smiles. Or temporize. The English can never be driven!"

"You will not fail there, my little Queen," the enamoured Dauphin said trembling with ague. "I saw how they looked at you. They were lovers for the moment. Why you are so beautiful only God and His Mother know, if it is not that you shall rule the world!"

And indeed the Englishmen were taken aback. They huddled into a consultation in the courtyard of the Louvre where they could be certain no eavesdropper could hear.

"Blood of God!" said Throckmorton, one of the envoys. "What a lady is that little Queen! She can never set foot in England. The other would tear her to rags for jealousy. The face, the eyes, the delicate speech! Gentlemen, we have seen a world's wonder! Her pale face and great eyes! The beauty of her!"

"Is it not possible she should win the liking of our Queen?" hazarded another. "If those two were friends the peace of the world were assured. And God knows Europe is but a battle-field as it is. Women rulers should bring peace."

Throckmorton laughed aloud.

"The liking of our Queen for such a Venus! Lord help the innocent man that thinks it possible! We must write with much discretion and cold praise, lest we find ourselves in the place where the fish settled in when he leaped from the frying-pan."

The Frenchmen, furious at the Calais insult, would hear no word of temporizing. On her coach doors, on her seals, on the silver she ate from, and the Dauphin's also, they stamped the arms of England. They flaunted them like insults in the face of Elizabeth's envoys. They played Elizabeth's game as if they had been paid to do it. But their most violent display of misplaced homage was reserved for the great tournament to be held in honour of the marriage in the mighty square in front of the Palace of Les Tournelles. There the bride must glitter in her English arms, and French and Scots splendours.

Never was such a gathering ! The King of France himself would tilt in honour of his new daughter but wearing the colours of Madame Diane de Poitiers. Not a great historic name of France but was represented among the knights who would tilt and the bright ladies who crowded the galleries with a sunlight dazzle of jewels. The jealous English owned among themselves that such splendour could not be found north of the Channel, as they watched for the coach carrying the Queen of the Tournament. She drew their thoughts from all others, she who might one day be their Queen.

Hark, what was that ? A roar of welcoming applause indistinguishable as the roaring of a great gale. She was coming through the adoring French, the huge multitude opening to make way for their darling, their romance and pride.

"A dangerous rival for our Queen !" Throckmorton said dryly. "Hark—Hark ! What's that ?"

For words were shaping as she drew nearer.

"*Vive la Reine d'Angleterre !* Long live the Queen of England !"

Redoubled, shouted, yelled, tossed on like spray from a great ocean, it came nearer and nearer. Throckmorton flushed and whitened. Did it forebode personal danger ? Not it ! But it foreboded reckless resolution and assumption. The clear sound of swords was in it for those who knew. He turned to his colleagues.

"Gentlemen, if this gets to England as it must, this Queen's chance of heirship to the crown is not worth a toss with our Queen. I had hoped she might name her for her heir and peace come that way. But if they will have it——" His look said the rest.

They stood grim and silent while the cries surged round them, and she ascended to the place of honour in the gallery with the French Queen beside her, lifted a little by the public homage, but knowing in all her wise young heart that thus to dare Elizabeth was fool's folly. And there was enough English in her blood to bring admiration of English defiance. She would do her best—she would soften Throckmorton. She would woo them to peace and courtesy. She would. . . . But silver trumpets sounded the charge and the soft thunder of horses' hoofs. She bent herself to look

and listen. The other must wait. After all—she must not be all conciliation. The power of France was mighty enough to trouble Elizabeth and the Reformed Faith in England if they too did not mind their manners.

Yet her mind in spite of her was more on the Queen of England than on the King of France as he drew up fair and florid—a man strong and sensuous—to his place in the charging line. She saw his amorous eye seek Madame Diane, Duchesse de Valentinois, as she leaned forward to flutter her silk handkerchief to her royal knight, and the Scots bride wondered how the French Queen could bear her husband's open infidelity with so calm a face. Probably the thought of her own private infidelities supported her with the knowledge that she gave as good as she got!

Hush! Now he was charging gallantly, lance at the drive, upon his old friend the Comte de Montgomeri. Splendid sight—white plumes flying, vizor down, a swoop like an eagle's—horse and man one. Victory to the King! All held their breath to applaud the shattering downfall of his friendly foe.

Again, hush! What was that? A yell of mortal agony. The King drops his lance. His gauntleted hands fly to his face, he sways aside—the horse falters, stumbles. The lance of his foe, driven up by the shock of his own, has wounded him in the head, in the eye—the brain. God of Heaven, the King is down!

Mary started up in her seat, clasping shuddering hands over a shuddering heart. Had it come and so soon? She had looked for quiet years as the Queen-Dauphiness, but this—! She could not think. Madame Diane was sobbing wildly beside her. The French Queen's speechless face was a mask of yellow ivory. The two Queens made their way to where he lay, surrounded by knights shouting for air, for doctors—distraught, unconscious that the Queens were nearing.

The English, pale and grim, craned over the shoulders of others to see. God, what a fate! What a change of policy! The rival on the French throne! So soon! Could it be possible?

A heavy rain began to fall. The people melted away, some weeping for they had loved the gallant amorous king well enough, and the Dauphin was but a boy. The English

hastened through crowded darkened streets to send the great news home. What would Elizabeth say ?

Four days later it was news indeed. Henry, King of France died at the Palace of Les Tournelles, and his last word was to the Dauphin and his bride. The French Queen's face was still a mask of yellow ivory, the black eyes shining in it like onyx as she turned to leave the death-chamber. She had not hoped for this so soon and yet—it might be for the best. Francis and Mary Stuart were King and Queen, and now only one life between her and her goal !

When they reached the great coach waiting to take them to the Louvre that the dead man might be left to the tools of the embalmers, Mary drew back courteously that her mother-in-law might precede her, but the French Queen took her hand with downward lids and humility.

" Madame, you are now Queen of France, and I—I go behind you. It is for you to walk first."

Queen of France, Queen of Scotland. And this too had happened by the same romance that watched over all her fortunes. The King of France could not die in his bed to provide her with another crown. No, he must fall like King Arthur at the head of his Round Table that the Stuart Queen might reign. Was it wonderful if a sense of destiny grew upon her ? So it would always be. Victory and not victory alone but fair with flying banners and the music of harps and lutes, and the worship of men's eyes.

But the shock was a shock for all that.

" We are too young to reign. Too young ! And your mother will hate me ! " she said sighing to her young King when they had a minute alone. " The weight is too great for us ! O, I am tired of diplomacy and fighting. I would like to be a girl for one short month, and ride and read and play and forget I am a queen."

" They will never forget or let us forget ! " Francis, King of France answered gloomily. " You are pale as death, Marie. For the sake of the Lord Omnipotent do not fail me now ! What strength have I ? "

What indeed ? That night she herself sat for a while strengthless, knowing that she must act for him, think for him, be his brain and heart and conscience. And not only for France—there was Scotland—and things going terribly

there in spite of her mother's frantic efforts. English money and plotting at the back of every prayer of John Knox and the Reformers, every aggression of the band of knights and nobles who fed from Elizabeth's hands, and did her base work in so rotting Scotland that she should fall from her bough like a wasp-eaten pear into English hands.

"She is more Queen of Scotland than I!" thought Mary, and indeed there were others who thought the same, and among them the Iscariot, her base-born brother, Lord James Stuart, who, ferret-eyed, was watching to see how the cat would jump there and in England.

But Queens have little time for brooding. Two months later preparations for the French coronation were in full swing, and Elizabeth sent a most distinguished embassage with her congratulations on the accession, and her desire that they should discuss the affairs of Scotland. The young King waved that aside. Scotland was his wife's. With her they must speak in her separate presence-chamber, and though Throckmorton winked at his colleague Mewtas no more could be done. They were not to ignore the young Queen as Elizabeth had instructed them to do. France declined that insult.

Indeed a very high lady! And they realized it during the coronation at Rheims, where she sat among her ladies in the great gallery on the right side of the altar. Not for her, crowned and anointed Queen in her own right, to be crowned by any husband. How could she promise him obedience as a subject, any more than he could promise it to her? She became Queen of France by right-royal as his wife and needed no crown but her own.

Throckmorton watched her sitting pensive among her ladies, and saw however the smile of joy, the bright flush like wine through alabaster, when the crown was set on her King's head. She felt, she knew, her power. She gladdened in it. Her head was held high and proudly. She leaned forward as if to launch her hopes and pride through the air to the King. A sight to rejoice men's eyes.

Throckmorton, watching, bethought him of a rhyme he had heard in Scotland when visiting Lord James Stuart and greasing his greedy palm with English money. The people sang it here and there.

The bonniest rose that in Scotland blows
Hangs high on the topmost bough.

High indeed. None higher. Could any wind of fate blow it in the dust? At all events Elizabeth and England would think the feat worth trying. He did not see her except at a distance then, or for a long time to come, though his duties kept him in France. But he watched her, lynx-eyed, and had her watched, and that day would have been a glad one for him and for Elizabeth, when in that court of foul living he could have found a hint, a spot as little as the mote in a sunbeam, upon her reputation, for that would have been meat and drink to the Queen of England. His hopes were vain—circling like flies over the dung-pit.

There was no spot on her. Poets praised her, musicians sang her, painters set what they could of her beauty on canvas, but no man came near enough even to be discouraged by her modesty. That was all he could learn. She met him with gracious courtesy when at last they did meet.

"Sir Nicholas," she said in her pretty Scots English, "I am much beholden to you for your patience. But I will write to your Queen, and if I send her my picture may I hope for hers?"

"Madam, Your Grace may hope," he responded with some want of tact, "but not with certainty as yet, for at the moment we have no painter worthy to set my Queen's living beauty on canvas, it consisting as much in majesty and nobility as in loveliness of feature and all womanly charms. Therefore, as I say, the thing must wait discreetly."

If Mary felt somewhat astonished she hid it. She had many pen-pictures of Elizabeth and more than one hasty coloured drawing, and could very well gauge that vaunted beauty. It had not overwhelmed her, but she thought the Queen well-looking and of high presence, and that appeared to be all that was necessary. She could little guess the rage, the hunger in the heart of Elizabeth for beauty. All but power she would have given to possess it, and power itself she would risk for that look in a man's eyes which proclaims him slave and master in a breath. Indeed fresh scandals as to her indecent intimacy with Lord Robert

Dudley were thronging the French Court, and causing great shame and inconvenience to Throckmorton.

"And as to the same picture," he said pompously, "there is another matter to consider. Can Your Grace sue for it while you assume the arms of England to my sovereign's great pain and indignity? She would be more than Queen and woman if she passed such an insult over. I saw those arms in the Coronation pageants. I see them everywhere and duly report it to my Queen."

The colour flushed into Mary's face in a moment. She might be courteous but there was nothing tame or fearful in her manner.

"And I would have you know, and the Queen also," she said stiffening in her great chair, "that I am an English princess, great-granddaughter to your King Henry the Seventh—and why should I not bear the arms of my family?"

Throckmorton countered neatly, as he thought: "Because, Madam, the arms of sovereigns do not descend as in noble families to a daughter's children, and they must not be quartered thus."

Mary was ready for him and laughed aloud, but sweetly.

"Then, Sir Nicholas, I must trouble you to tell me why your Queen quarters the arms of France which she inherits through a female ancestor. And why does she style herself Queen of France—a thing too ridiculous for words, since no woman can reign in France—it being against French laws that any woman reigns?"

Throckmorton was silenced. Why indeed? That was the weak spot in the English argument. He had himself said as much to Elizabeth before coming to France, foreseeing the bogs in which it would land him. And with what result? Merciful Powers! He had shaken in his shoes. She was her father all over at the moment. Her furious face!

"God's death, Sir Nicholas, and you counsel me to be humble and yield to the French what no king my predecessor has yielded! What? Is England to lessen in my hands? I would sooner die. The French arms are mine, and I will call myself Queen of France to their noses. Let them lump it if they do not like it. But the whey-faced

Scots child shall give in or I will know the reason why!"

Women—women! And toys of arms and the like! There were times when Throckmorton wished they had two kings on the two thrones who could fight it out and there an end. He foresaw endless coils of diplomacy, successful for the Scots Queen as likely as not. But if ever she came to rule in England he would wish to be well with her, and this was not the way to it. She was too powerful here in France, too popular. He said to his colleague Mewtas that day that the best thing for England would be the death of Francis and her return to Scotland.

"We should have her then in the hollow of our hand. Her base-born brother James Stuart would sell her like Judas to England if he could get his price."

"And that may come," said Mewtas philosophically. "They say this French lad cannot last above two years. She nurses him like the apple of her eye, but what then? A man needs only to look at his long thin throat and hollow cheek to see death in the brightness of his eye."

Throckmorton grunted a kind of assent. He wished he had the gift of prophecy. It would help him with Elizabeth and more.

Mary also foresaw and feared. They were nearly two years married now and no sign of children. No sign of returning health. He began to speak of the future to her frankly.

He lay one day on a couch in the great window at Chenonceaux and looked out over the shining water. The Maries and their gallants were galloping in the crisp November sunshine through the rustle of russet leaves. It was a day that spoke of life and energy and health, but he lay propped on pillows, languid and sick at heart. He loved her tender unwearying care for his health, and her dutifulness to King and husband. She too should have been flying through keen air on her white Arab but nothing would move her from his side. His thin hot hand felt for hers and grasped it. She could feel the sick quick pulse beating swiftly to the end, and trembled.

"*Marie, ma mie*, how good you are to me. You have borne so patiently with my sickness and dullness. Is it for love's sake?"

His dying eyes implored her assurance.

"For what else, my heart? We were children together. Who should love each other if not we? I have never had a thought but of you. Not one."

It satisfied him, and her tenderness satisfied him yet more deeply. He had not lived long enough to understand a man's passion and a woman's response. He could not ask for what he did not know, nor she grant it.

"When I die, my beloved——"

A cold shudder ran through her blood. He had never said this before. Now he took it simply for granted. She put a fair hand across his lips but he drew it aside smiling faintly.

"When I die, my beloved, do not go to Scotland. I think it safer here. The English are too strong in Scotland, and the red-haired virago dances your men to her music. Stay here and pray for my soul. My mother and all will love you, and you will have peace. Stay here."

"Hush, my heart, my heart!" the girl said, putting her arm about his neck and raising his head to her bosom. "You shall live. The new doctor is all skill. Yes, you shall live and I will do your work for you until you have strength. I love you. Stay with me."

She would not say a word of what had escaped him—his mother's hatred, her own insecurity at the French Court. Why grieve him with what he could not alter? He had pangs enough. She put young lips to his wasted cheek as if to breathe her own life into him. Indeed she was mother as well as wife to the lad, and he knew it.

"Heart of my heart, of course they would be kind to me, but I want no kindness but yours. None other will I have. O we will be happy! This is winter, but see—at Fontainebleau soon the wind-flowers will be coming—no, the snowdrops first, and then the golden daffodils, and the warm spring dancing in the woods where none can see. And strength will come with her pure airs and every day you will grow stronger, my young knight and King whom I love. And some day I shall come to you and stand proudly before you, a Queen indeed, and I shall say: 'Your Majesty, I, a King also, have news for you. That of our love a son shall be born who shall rule the world,' and you will spring to your feet and fling your arms in air and cry aloud:

'Thanks to the Mother of God and her Son,' and then ——"

She raised her cheek. . . . He was too quiet. Had he fallen asleep in her embrace? Had he not heard? He was cold and pale as death. He had swooned away into a death-like faint, and crying aloud she laid him down and rushed to the ante-room for help—for any help in heaven or earth.

Two days later they administered the Last Rites, and the Viaticum of departure was laid upon the lips of the Most Christian King, the eldest son of the Church. Mary did her utmost for him, and that was little in her eyes for all his heart clung with dying fidelity to her; he thought of her and not of heaven. She knelt, still supporting him, weary, pale as ashes, her eyes upon him, her ears strained for the low murmur which only she could understand, keeping her vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane with him. None could separate them. All stood aside to watch the ebbing of the tide which was to leave her alone in the world, and so young.

What thoughts she had in that moment who could tell? There were no tears in her eyes, nothing but the fixed look of motherhood which sees its beloved drawn slowly and irresistibly from its embrace by a power omnipotent.

Once she spoke.

"Could I have done more, Francis? Have I failed in anything?"

And though he was past speech his eyes answered her question fully, passionately.

A day later Throckmorton wrote to Elizabeth, anxiously awaiting the news.

> "On the 5th December at eleven o'clock in the night he departed to God, leaving as sad and sorrowful a wife as she had reason to be who, by long watching with him during his sickness, and by painful diligence about him is ill in her own body."

Elizabeth smiled in reading that letter—the first smile she had accorded to her rival no longer Queen of France.

But the French King Charles, who succeeded his brother

Francis, would look at her portrait when she was far away in cruel Scotland and say, sighing: "Ah, Francis! Short were your life and reign, and yet you are to be envied because you possessed that loveliest of all ladies, and her heart was yours."

CHAPTER IV

THAT short life and reign were ended indeed. The ever flickering flame of life had flared up and dropped for ever. Forty days shut from sunlight in a room with black hangings, lit only by lamp-light, clad in white like a nun from head to foot—but a few inches of her face showing between the *barbe* on her brow and the close wimple at her chin—so must a French Queen mourn for her King. The cold of the palace was appalling—the great draughty rooms, the ill-hung doors and windows chilled her very soul, and Mary, a summer flower who withered in frosts, felt herself frozen into ice from head to foot. The face of eighteen short years was white as her flowing robes, shadowed under the great eyes, pale even to the lips. All day long she sat half-stupefied, dwelling on the past with its lost glories, trembling for the future. She could not dwell as much on the lost boy. Her relation to him had been one of affectionate pity and loyalty, anxious trembling care for his suffering. Now he needed neither, and her life must begin again without him.

She turned her eyes on Mary Seton who alone of the Maries had shut herself up with the White Queen, (as the French called her,) and spoke in a low voice.

"Mary Seton, have you thought—for I think of nothing else—that our happy days in France are done? It wrings my heart but it is true. There is no place for two Queens here, and the Queen-Mother has made me feel it already—and bitterly. She has a cruel heart. What shall I do? How can I live in that cold, cold country which killed my unhappy mother? If they would but let me stay here, living on my own lands in Touraine, I would most gladly leave Scotland to my bastard brother and live forgotten and forgetting. O that I might!"

The high spirit of Mary Seton would not bear this—she

was a Scotswoman to her heart's core, and Scotland was first with her always. She rose and stood before the Queen, tall in her smothering black.

"What, Mary Stuart! You, who are Queen to talk like a minikin demoiselle who will give up the world because her pet sparrow is dead! I loved your King as a sick boy whom one must pet and nurse. Did you love him otherwise? Now he is gone. Wake up! You are Queen of France still. Death cannot undo it, but most you are Queen of Scotland! Do great ladies throw away their duties? *Certainly* we go to Scotland! What else?"

The young Queen stared at her. Many a home-truth had she heard from the Seton girl, daughter of a great and loyal house, but this was hard to bear. Yet it was true. She knew it, and responded like a generous horse to the prick of the spur.

"True. Go on. Scorn is better for me than many sermons! I have deserved it."

But Mary Seton fell on her knees with tears.

"That I should hurt you, my heart's darling, when you have griefs to bear!" she sobbed. "But this mourning is death in life, no better! O, that someone, something, would come to break it, and make the dead clocks tick and our pulses beat again. Widowhood kills one when they make it a prison like this."

Indeed it was the old story of *La Belle au bois dormante*. It was as if the beauty of the world lay frozen in a death-sleep of eternal winter. Who would come and wake her with a kiss? The girl hung languidly over her drawing, designing sorrowful "devices," as she called them, and watering them with listless tears of self-pity. One lay on the table before her now—a bitter-stemmed liquorice plant drooping towards its sweet root with the motto "Earth hides my sweetness." And her new watch lay beside it, a crystal in the shape of a coffin, with another—a grinning death's head helmeted in ebony and ivory—which she had just offered to Mary Seton. Morbid, ghastly, and unwholesome the slow days crawled by. Their youth clamoured against it.

"I believe in my soul we shall go mad if this goes on," Mary Seton cried furiously. "Why should we see only women? I hope we know how to behave ourselves with

men even if we *are* a three-weeks' widow ! These French ! "

A faint smile crinkled the corners of Mary Stuart's lips at the quaint phrasing. Mary Seton always identified herself with her Mistress. She took the device of the liquorice plant and looked at it listlessly but said nothing.

A lugubrious figure in black, hidden-faced, hooded like Fate moved solemnly from the arched doorway into the room and stood before her speaking in a voice of the grave. It was the lady of honour in charge.

" Madame, two gentlemen of England have come riding post, though not together, and desire to see you. Not for God's salvation would I intrude on Your Majesty's grief, but that each holds a letter from the Queen-Mother requesting you to give him audience. That you will refuse with indignation I know well, but the royal message must be given. I entreat forgiveness for a shameful disturbance of woe."

Mary Seton had risen at once to stand on duty beside her Mistress's chair. She laid her fingers on the back, and it was not by accident that one touched Mary's shoulder. It said as plain as finger could speak : " However dull, however political these men may be, they will not be women ! They will bring a breath of the outer world where human beings still live and laugh. For the sake of common sense let them come. We need them."

Mary understood that finger and the young blood in her answered the message. She knew very well, though no word had been uttered, that Europe outside must be ringing and gonging with speculations as to her remarriage. Cabinets and councils would be held. Kings and ministers would plot, and Queens lend their aid of merry or angry whispers and tattle. All that plotting filled the air with secret whispering when her boy-husband's illness was known to be hopeless, but she had deafened her ears. Now —a little palpitation of curiosity stirred under the iced surface. It presaged a faint far-off interest to see what was proposed by those who did not know her resolution to rule, a lifelong widowed Queen. She spoke gravely and sadly however.

" Madame, I think with you. It is cruel that my hours of grief should be broken. Yet if I am a broken-hearted widow I am also a Queen, and these gentlemen may bring stern news. Who is the first ? "

The lady spoke through starched lips.

"Madame, it is a grace they could hardly expect, and they will be prepared if you refuse. The first announces himself as a kinsman of Your Majesty's, the Lord Darnley, son of the Earl of Lennox."

Mary, amazed, put up her white fan to conceal a twitch of the lips. She had never seen the "long lad" as men called him, but some scapegrace tales recurred which made her glad that Mary Seton stood decorously behind her. Eyes meeting eyes the two girls might have laughed, in which case the sky itself must have fallen.

"Tell my Lord Darnley that I cannot refuse to see my cousin as commanded by the Queen-Mother, but bid him remember, Madame, that this is a chamber of mourning where a broken heart hides itself from the light of day. He will know how to respect it."

The lady swept an awful curtsy and retreated backward. In her opinion the Queen-Mother and the widowed Queen had both taken leave of their senses. A man in the presence of the white nun who had been Queen—and that man young! Disapproval was in every line of her stiff shrouded figure as she moved towards the door.

"A glass—a glass!" Mary whispered, directly she had vanished. "Run, Mary Seton! It is not vanity—no; but a Queen must look as she should when a subject has audience, and this subject is as much mine as Elizabeth's. I may hear something of the red-headed witch. Hurry!"

Already it had done her good. Already there was a touch of life and youth in the lifeless stillness of the great room. Mary Seton sped for the glass with lighter feet than for the past three weeks and returned running. With delicate fingers she coaxed out a mesh or two of silken-soft hair from under the hard white *barbe* that bound the forehead. She soothed the eyes with a refreshing lotion that obliterated tear-traces and brightened them, then stopped and surveyed her work.

"And now, Madam, permit me to hide these dreadful watches that give me the shudders as I look at them. Yes, it is well to meditate upon our latter end, but we have done it enough and too much in the last three weeks. It has drained us of blood—of life. Have a little pity on my Lord Darnley, I beseech you."

A quick glance that was nearly a smile passed between them as slow steps were heard approaching, with the rustle of a silken dress. No man might conduct him—only ladies in black marshalled his quaking steps. Few young men have felt more discomfiture. She ought to weep at him and probably would! He appeared at the door with the lady of honour preceding him.

Mary sat stiff as an image in chilled ivory. The fiction of custom insisted that the ravages of grief had made her unable to move. But a quick glance shared impressions with Mary Seton as she stood a little in advance and at one side.

He was a long lad indeed, tall, excellently well-knit, with fair curling hair, and the blue eyes of a Scotsman set in a broad forehead. Also there was an ardent sparkle in them from which it might be read or guessed that any likely lass would receive the same salute. His position was peculiar, and one which gave him great advantage in the cunning game now to be played for her hand, since he was her cousin of Scots blood as royal as her own, and on his mother's side of English blood-royal, and well in the race for the succession to that crown. These were hopes which gave his worldly father and mother the keenest interest in getting the two acquainted and entangled as soon as decency allowed it, and if this visit leaked out the whole of Europe would be agog. Still, he had sprung at his chance. Luck must be hunted with whip and spur, and other men would be at the same game.

Dressed to perfection in black and white, trained in courts to catch the eye of Elizabeth or Mary as might chance in his destined profession of King Consort, the long lad performed his first bow exquisitely by the door, the next in the middle of the room. The third brought him to her feet where he knelt to kiss the hand she extended, bowing a bright young head over it.

He was life, he was youth, and all that these names inspire in dancing blood. A wave of spring broke into the room of death, and life became importunate once more—not only life but the frivolities which make it lovely. Mary found herself noting the grace of his black velvet sleeves slashed with silver, and the sunshine of his golden head. He had certainly taken time and thought to wash the travel-stains

away! But she spoke with cold grace as befitted a Queen whose only thoughts are heavenward.

"Monsieur, my cousin, it gives me such satisfaction as my sorrow permits me to see you. And are your noble parents well?"

But while he answered the stiff courtesy his eyes were roving, for he knew, none better, that if the wishes of his parents were fulfilled here sat his royal wife. Elizabeth was too old for him and, it was whispered, sterile. This would be the better wife if her ambitions were not too high. A great young lady indeed, but had not the King's daughter of Hungary loved a humble squire? And of his own good looks and manners he was amply confident.

He sat on the low stool placed near her. His royal Scots blood commanded that observance, otherwise he must have stood. And now, left alone with the Queen and Mary Seton, he did his best to win both hearts, not knowing how far the maid of honour might influence the Mistress. He had the good taste to avoid the lighter topics of masque and revel for so his mother had warned him, and struck a graver note by mentioning Elizabeth's health. Mary caught at that.

"My cousin, I have heard that Queen mentioned only by statesmen bound to describe her as a world's wonder. Tell me, is she beautiful?"

Darnley hesitated.

It would be almost as much as his life was worth in England if he disparaged Elizabeth's pretensions as reigning beauty of the world, but it was vital also that the Scots Queen should be made to understand that in his own opinion as a man of taste she herself was the first—she only. He considered a second before speaking.

"She is like a noble Greek head cut on a gold medal, Madam, with pride, stateliness and fire which become Her Majesty excellently. Her eyes are dark and piercing, her hair auburn, gold-threaded, her hand exquisite—especially on the lute which she plays like a siren. I can answer also for her foot and ankle. They do not live very secluded!"

Had he gone too far in his praises? Yet it was needful. A bird of the air might carry the matter, not to mention Mary Seton who herself might be the spy of Elizabeth, which another of the Maries was to prove later. Certainly Mary's brow was grave, but she spoke while he hunted for

a phrase insinuating that necessity rather than truth had driven him.

"That is what Princes should be in the eyes of their subjects. I have heard of my good sister's good beauty, and rejoice in it. I wish I may win such a noble person's affection since we come of the same blood. You no doubt wish the same, my Lord!" she added including him gracefully.

He bridled at that. Never was man vainer and in some ways simpler than Darnley—a lad at the mercy of any flatterer. Mary Seton took his measure in a moment and stamped it on her brain for future reference. She knew as well as he did the motive of his headlong ride to see his cousin, and her lips shut with finality. *That* would not do! He was no sword for the Queen's hand. No prop for her weakness. For, that she had her weaknesses as Queen and woman none knew better than Mary Seton.

"And has so lovely a lady thoughts of marriage as all her faithful subjects must wish?" Mary asked courteously at last.

Darnley giggled. No other word suits his meaning bubble of laughter. Surely he was safe with these young women in that shut-in hearse-like room. They would see the absurdity of what he had to tell.

"Marriage, Madam? That is not a word which Her Majesty's pride will swallow for a long time yet. She will love perhaps—it has been known in Queens of England—and all her time and thoughts are set on my Lord Robert Dudley. The world knows it."

Mary looked studied unbelief. It piqued him.

"Madam, I dare assure you she shows it openly. Knighting him the other day she could not resist tickling her white fingers in his neck with all the court about them; and he comes and goes in her bed-chamber as much or more than his office directs."

But Mary stiffened. This was most dangerous for her to hear, and however interesting, not the talk for a young widow with the tears still wet on her cheek. Her voice was ice-edged.

"I understood, my Lord, that you had urgent business and with the Queen-Mother's recommendation."

He thought it scarcely fair after she had drawn him on with a question, and stiffened in his turn. "Sulked"

would be the better word. His father and mother had spoiled him from the cradle as the priceless baby who might be King of England one day through one cousin or another. Indeed his mother was next heiress to England if Queen Mary failed, and therefore he was watched by Elizabeth with an eye whose jealousy pointed his comments. Business indeed! He felt his visit a favour in that hideous gloom set up for a mere schoolboy in his grave!

"My business, Madam, was to see you with my mother's recommendation, and to implore your favour for the restoration of her great estates in Scotland—partly swallowed by Your Grace's brother Lord James Stuart."

It was all as silly as could be. The long lad had no sense, Mary Seton said to herself as she stood at attention. She despised his folly. He should have known that Mary loved her bastard brother, and if mere greed were the spur that had brought him here at a gallop——!

But he was speaking again: "And, Madam, for I do not hide the truth, I wished to see the face of a cousin which is rumoured to be the loveliest on God's earth. And for that reason I told the Queen-Mother——"

"What, sir?" Mary was biting a smile back into the dimple at the corner of her mouth.

"I said—God forgive me!—that I had a letter of the utmost consequence from the English Queen desiring a meeting with Your Grace as soon as possible. And I said——"

Mary made a motion with her hand. Her face was inscrutable again, for she had been well trained in her royal profession. Only Mary Seton could read the hidden thought—not he.

"Then, my Lord, I thank you and must drop again into my sad thoughts which you interrupted. They would have been more cheerful if you had really borne the letter you speak of. There is nothing in the world I desire more than a happy meeting between two Queens, cousins and husbandless in the same island. Two——"

He caught at the word.

"You go to Scotland, Madam?"

"I did not say so. I say farewell with good wishes and prayers for your noble parents, and——"

"And for myself, Madam?" He caught at that, rising tragically.

"A good share more of discretion!" she said with dropped demure eyelids.

How it reassured him! He fell on his knees to kiss her hand, not once or twice but most indiscreetly often. His upward look gave her the truth of his opinion upon the vaunted beauty he had come to seek in a way that was itself a blazing indiscretion. He remained so long upon his knees that it became a passionate homage to beauty—and not to the widowed grief of the French Queen. Mary Seton hurriedly revised her opinion. He was indiscretion itself, but indiscretion which might succeed where wisdom failed. Should beauty-blinded manhood calculate each period?

As he made his final bow at the door and the black old lady resumed custody of him like age imprisoning youth, there was a lovely flush on Mary Stuart's pale face and a dipping light of laughter in her eyes.

"The young fool!" she said. "To talk like that and on such an errand! But the long lad is a handsome one and his royal blood tells. Mary, *ma mie*, are they talking outside in the world of whom I must marry? The cruel, cruel politicians! No—do not tell me. It hurts. Listen instead to these verses I have made for my dear dead little King. He loved my verses."

Mary Seton interpreted this quite rightly. It meant: "I have been happy for a moment. My vanity and youth breathed again. That was a crime. Now I must remember. That question I asked was a disgrace to a widow of eighteen. I must use all means to sharpen my grief."

She took up a paper from the table. Ronsard had commended her as a poet therefore she had some right to think herself one, and was given to versifying alike in French and Latin. In spite of her resolution a gleam of author's vanity pierced the feeling with which she read.

The voice of my sad song
  With mournful sweetness guides
My piercing eye along
  The track that death divides.
With sharp and bitter sighs
  My youth's bright morning dies.

Within my heart and eye
  His image is portrayed.
My dress of grief is nigh,
  My weeping eyelids fade
To the wan violet's blue
  The mourning lover's hue.

I hear his voice once more
  I thrill to that dear touch——

But here she broke down sobbing. She took it for grief unquenchable. Mary Seton saw it for youth trying to lash itself into an eternal covenant with death. It could not last. The future had already thrust its way to them.

"My heart, my heart!" she said, passing a tender arm round the girl's shaking shoulders as the tears dropped on her paper. "Time will be good to you. And now let us see the other man. It is Monsieur de Throckmorton, Ambassador of the Queen of England."

Mary rallied as at the call of necessity. But this time she asked no glass. And into that mood Throckmorton walked, unmoved by pity, with a cold clear weighing eye to estimate her chances against his Queen's. Too young, he thought, too beautiful, soft and womanly. Queens indeed should be beautiful because it moved the multitude, but this one had gone too far. The thing was overdone. No one wanted a crowned Helen to drive the jealousies of Europe mad and exasperate Elizabeth into a perpetual fury. The thing was ridiculous!

He came in the black lady's custody, bowing stiffly, harsh and angular also in his opinions, and the court ruff supporting his lean face like another John Baptist's head on the charger. He thought angrily that she wore her grief like a flower. She should not look so angelically fair and pale—such a tragedy of grief with upraised eyes filmed with tears that besought all men's love and pity. Such a face would be a positive danger in England where all the young hotheads would have swords out in her cause however foolish. He wished he could find some fault that would show like mud on her chastity, and nose and lips swollen and red with crying would have cheered him. But he was a truthful man for a statesman, and honesty had compelled him to

write to Elizabeth who must know the truth however palatably presented :

> " Now, that God has disposed of the King what we must reckon with is the Queen's marriage. During his life no great account was made of her for being under the bond of marriage there was no great occasion to know what was in her. But since his death she has shown great wisdom for her years, modesty and judgment. And some who made no great account of her, now honour and pity her."

And again he had spoken of her " queenly modesty ! " All of which was wormwood to Elizabeth with whom modesty was not a foremost virtue. Perhaps Throckmorton was not unwilling to give an oblique hint in that direction, for rumour was laughing with her ugliest glee over Elizabeth and Robert Dudley. Anyhow she must know the facts, and would to God she would learn from them ! There were moments when not only he but many wished they could exchange the two Queens, barring only Mary's fatal Catholicism.

Him she rose to meet as representing Elizabeth and carrying her condolences, which she received very sweetly, seating herself after.

" And it has done my heart more good, monsieur, than anything yet, that my good sister of England should so pity my grief, for in her I hope to find much comfort as from a Queen who understands a Queen's heart, beside the bond of kindred blood."

It gave even Throckmorton a feeling as near sympathy as he was ever likely to attain. She was so young and solitary with only another young girl as her guard in that black room. Both glimmered like night moths in it. He bowed gravely.

" I say, Madam, that in this grief you have carried yourself so honourably and discreetly that it is a thing to be wished by all Englishmen and wise men, that one of the two Queens of the Isle of Britain could be transformed into the shape of a man, for that would make the happiest marriage in all the wide world ! "

" Marriage—ah, if *that* could be ! " said Mary sighing.

"But otherwise, never! If she has the mind to be a Virgin Queen I have the same for a widowed life, and in that we well agree. So I hope. But, sir, I have a question to ask. It was always hoped and prayed by my subjects that if death separated me from the French kingdom I should return to my own. Will my good sister give me a safe-conduct through England to my kingdom that we may meet and so lay friendship's foundation?"

Now this was a most ticklish question for more reasons than one.

To journey through England to Berwick winning the hearts of all the dutifully loyal Northern lords! Throckmorton trembled. The appearance of so much beauty and charm would be intolerable to Elizabeth. He foresaw, what Shakespeare was later to write from sad experience, that certain stars would shoot madly from their spheres to hear that sea-maid's music, for England was still half Catholic, and a lovely Catholic Queen could not be risked within her bounds for a moment. But yet the request was very natural, and how to refuse it in the face of Europe? He looked at this large-eyed lady—were her eyes truly so innocent?—as she went on.

"I intend to send Monsieur d'Oysell to my good sister to declare that the King of France has lent me galleys to take me to Scotland, and I shall ask of her what I have said, though the terms on which we have stood have not been what I have wished up to the present."

Now that was a foolish reminder which showed her youth. Let sleeping dogs lie! He caught at it instantly with a long penetrating stare intended to frighten her.

"Madam, those terms were not of my Queen's seeking. If Your Grace had not used her coat of arms, and had made such a treaty as she earnestly wished, you would have been welcome in England as flowers in May and to her bosom also. And your religion also is a grief to her."

Mary who knew Elizabeth had cheerfully sold her private convictions for a crown and cared little enough for anything but policy lifted her lip a little proudly.

"Religion? I shall have trouble for it, yet shall not change. Many of my own subjects have joined the new religion which seems to consist in forcing others to do as you do. For myself I am not so. Let each worship God

as he will provided he gives others the same liberty. And if that is to be the price of a safe-conduct through England it is not for me. I shall constrain none, but neither will I be constrained."

He smiled to himself under his appearance of gravity. If that was to be her course in Scotland he foresaw difficulties by which England would be quick to profit. That was one rock she would split on and he could foresee plenty more.

She rose with a wearied air as a sign that the audience was at an end.

"Do your best for me, monsieur, that I and my sister may live in peace. I know ministers have it in their power to do much harm and much good, and you must be my voice to her. Show her my true heart."

He bowed low and perhaps at the moment had the will to do her bidding, but, as she stood in her flowing white like a beautiful nun who has renounced the world, a prevision was on him that it might be better for the girl here and now if she took that decision rather than affront the brutalities of Scotland, and the fierce jealousies of Elizabeth as Queen and woman. He judged her unfitted for times when religion was esteemed by the zest with which it persecuted others, too young and hopeful, too easy to weep, launching her bright boat in seas inconceivably stormy. Could God himself bring her safe to harbour? He hoped not, for there would be England's advantage.

Elizabeth certainly would not aid the Almighty. So delicate was the position that Throckmorton himself, in spite of a stomach that loathed the channel, sick and soured with a three-days' tossing, journeyed over to see her at Greenwich.

She received him in the luxurious little room which she kept for her intimates—looking out over the trees of the Park, still leafless and stark, though summer reigned in the room itself with a great log fire and sumptuous velvet and tapestry hangings like a casket for a jewel. A great Holbein portrait of her father hung over the fire-place, broad and burly with thin sensuous lips in a fleshy face, his small eyes keen as knives even in paint and canvas. No portrait of her mother attended him. It was Elizabeth's policy to neglect the memory of that besmirched lady whom the hideous accusations of incest and adultery made a black

background for the purities of a Virgin Queen. It was said of her indeed that she would willingly have sprung like Minerva from the head of Jupiter without the aid of a mortal mother, and certainly the Boleyn's name never passed her lips.

Therefore her own portrait by Zucchero faced her father's, young yet stripped of youth by the stiff and tasteless dress, flat and jewelled as the Queen of Diamonds in a pack of cards, not a shadow on the sharp-chinned face lest it should fail to flatter her milky skin. She wore the same dress at the moment, crimson satin of excessive richness, with golden eyes and ears embroidered all over it to denote her omniscience which nothing could escape, and a snake of wisdom coiled in gold on one sleeve. The dress spread in a broad stiff hoop straight out from the waist which gave her middle wooden slenderness, and her breasts prominence perhaps a little accentuated by art. The fine throat rose above it, and her aquiline face, thin-lipped but handsome and with piercing dark eyes pale-lashed but well set, was impressive against the hard background of a wired ruff edged with pearls. But the crimson went ill with the red of her hair, and the dress while it left her stately as a matured woman divested her of grace. Unconsciously Throckmorton must compare her with the white slender figure whose cause he was come to—was it to plead or stab? He was not himself certain at the moment, for a kind of angry shame rose in him to see her Robin, as she called Robert Dudley, lounging on the back of her chair with assured familiarity that made every man who valued her position desire to smite good manners into him. The young Scots Queen knew better than that—the Tudor blood in her was not adulterated with the Boleyn mixture, that had always made Elizabeth insensitive to certain points of behaviour and vulgar in her familiarities. It had ruined her mother. It might ruin her yet.

She welcomed Throckmorton warmly and with a jest to Robin on his sea-sickness more free than enough, and then: "And the widow? Does she cry her eyes out for the crown of France? A come-down in the world, look at it how you will! And who does she set her cap at now?"

It jarred on Throckmorton, thinking of the young dignity and loneliness of the girl in France, and Dudley's

coarse laugh accentuated his distaste. But politics were politics and he conquered it.

"Why, Madam, all the world in France talks of who it shall be, and offers come as thick as snowflakes in December. But it is of more consequence at the moment that the lady wants to be at home—no love lost between her and the French Queen-Mother! And I have a message for your own ear——"

He looked meaningly at Dudley who lounged and laughed assured, and Elizabeth put a caressing hand on his as it lay on the back of her chair.

"My Robin can stay. What is there Robin may not know?" So Throckmorton was forced to open the business before him.

Instantly she was on her feet raging.

"What? The Scots huzzy asks to come through this country that she may make her mischiefs from here to Edinburgh, and poison every man's mind against his lawful Sovereign! God's death! Does she indeed? But I will put her and her plots to open shame before the Spanish Ambassador to-morrow, and show them that I am a match for all the Catholics in Europe. What? *She* to bear my arms and come to flaunt herself as my heir and reckon over her inheritance! If you have encouraged it, Throckmorton, you are a traitor and no servant of mine!"

And so forth with due encouragement from Dudley. Of the matter Throckmorton could not complain. He too knew that there was no place for Catholicism in England, and that Elizabeth was right. But the manner he detested. And next day with the Spanish Ambassador present, permission was coarsely and loudly refused for Mary's journey through England, and he caught himself wishing once again that the Queens could be changed and Scotland made a part of England—as it must be—without the sacrifice of decency and honour which he foresaw too well. There was still some decency left in his crinkled walnut of a heart, though he would lie and cheat for Elizabeth as well as another. She was a necessity of the moment. Most Englishmen allowed that.

Dudley lounged up with his meaning laugh when the Queen had gone.

"Is she as fair-faced as they say, Master Throckmorton?

I would like to have a sly look at the pretty widow. Mewtas says he has never seen her like."

"For me, I have no time for pretty ladies," Throckmorton answered dryly. "My own Sovereign is my only care."

"That saying may be taken two ways! You had better not let our great Lady hear the distinction," said Dudley laughing, and fingering the great jewel of emeralds and diamonds which Elizabeth had given him the day before. He was as sure at that moment of becoming King Consort of England as Throckmorton was certain he would not. But that belief did not stand in the way of a very sharp eye for other beauties than Gloriana, as it was becoming the fashion for the poets to call her.

Throckmorton frowned and went off. He detested Dudley, and though he would have been hung drawn and quartered for Elizabeth he wished her father had flogged manners into her. The lack of them left her better-bred servants ashamed in the face of Europe.

CHAPTER V

BY the end of July all was settled for Mary Stuart's departure—all excepting only the question of whether she would be driven to run the gauntlet of the English warships at sea, or might be permitted to land in England if driven by storm or illness. Elizabeth had not yet given her final answer to d'Oysell. This hindered her preparations and clouded her last days in Paris, and still the oracle had not spoken.

The day before she left Paris d'Oysell returned flaming with fury. He rushed into Mary's presence charged to bursting with the news he had to tell, outraged as a Frenchman, as a man of gallantry, red with wrath and scorn.

"Madame, that princess, who should not be called a princess so far is she from every grace of courtesy, sent for me in audience and when I went, expecting the privacy due to the envoy of a crowned Queen with important business to declare, I found her in the midst of a crowded circle including the Spanish Ambassador. She called me as one summons a page, in a loud hectoring voice: 'Aha, so you come to see me on behalf of the Queen of Scots!' I bowed, Madame, with the dignity I owe to myself. And she shouted like a virago—for I can use no other term: 'Tell your Mistress from me that I grant no safe-conduct through the narrow seas or along my coasts or through England to one who by her conduct and open enmity and bearing of my arms-royal has declared herself my enemy and the enemy of the true religion and of all freedom.' This, turning her head proudly to see that all admired her wit! A smile flew from lip to lip though it was quickly quenched, so furious were the looks she darted. The Spanish Ambassador made a step forward as if to remonstrate in the name of decency, but held back, fearing probably to make matters worse, and I, left standing alone, bowed proudly and

retired. Mother of God, what a woman! What coarseness, even in a man—but no crowned man could be such a boor!"

With her own grace in full play for contrast Mary controlled her temper and smoothed the ruffled feathers.

"Sir, you endured a public slight for my sake and with a courtesy ill-deserved. I shall not forget your merit. For myself I shall sail for Scotland at the appointed time trusting in God; and a band of French gentlemen as well as my own Scots will accompany me, so that this Queen may raise international questions if she attack me, passing on my rightful business to my kingdom. Meanwhile I must see Monsieur de Throckmorton."

She saw him at St. Germain-en-Laye when she had taken her last sad farewell of Paris the beautiful and beloved, now shedding true tears at her parting. Throckmorton sent in his application for an audience, d'Oysell earnestly entreating her to refuse it in view of such gross behaviour.

"And be myself as discourteous as they?" she answered with her own smile. "Alas, no, monsieur, that cannot be! But since Throckmorton comes, forget nothing that may instruct me as to their meaning. Did you hear anything else of importance?"

"Madame, yes, and I am ashamed to tell such words though you should know it. I thought well to feign a slight deafness at the English Court, and heard her cousin, my Lord Hunsdon, whisper aside to the Earl of Sussex as the Queen raged on, and what he said was this: 'My lord, this anger will please Lord James Stuart the Scots Queen's base-born brother and the false Scots very well.' And I warn Your Majesty not to trust your brother Lord James Stuart nor any that are his, for all I hear in England, both from your partisans and others, assures me that he is in that Queen's pay and that she dances him and them as puppets on a string. You shall take nothing but harm from their counsels. They are her lickspittle servants and false as hell."

Again Mary smiled.

"Sir, my brother is base-born but I love him and he me. He appears to play a part that he may gain information for me. O, I can trust him! There is none in the world if he should fail me, now my wise mother is gone, for my

kingdom is sorely disturbed with religion and the base plottings of this Queen. But, as to my brother, he is Stuart and true. Indeed I thank you for your good-will."

She gave him her hand to kiss, and little knew she had rejected a warning of the utmost and most terrible import, one which if taken would have altered the whole course of history. Fate who had given her all gifts but wisdom and distrust of the base blinded her. In her innocent cunning she had resolved to give Throckmorton a hint that these lies were abroad in relation to her brother, and to assure the English plotters that they would get no good that way, but now it appeared that the very hint would be an insult to her own blood in James Stuart, and she determined on opening her mind fully to him alone on the aspersion when they met in Scotland.

Throckmorton entered, bowing coldly with only the exact measure of respect due to a foreign Sovereign who must be made to feel the weight of English displeasure. She rose to receive him and hear Elizabeth's reply as though she herself had been present, tall and very stately in the sweeping robe of black satin which was now her mourning, and with no emblem of queendom but a long and most magnificent chain of black muscatel pearls wound about her throat. They were indeed a world's wonder by reason of their size and unique colour and matching. In perfect silence she listened until he had brought his lengthy declaration to an end, standing motionless to hear.

"Will you sit, monsieur?" she said at last, "and I will beg these ladies and gentlemen to retire to the distance of the chamber that we may be private. For I am not without pride and temper, and if they overcome me I prefer a smaller audience than that which your Queen was content to have when she talked with Monsieur d'Oysell."

Men and women looked at each other as they drew back to the furthest distance. There was a subdued whisper of approval of this dignified rebuke, and red flushed into Throckmorton's harsh face. Not of anger with her. He was angry with Elizabeth. She had been too coarse, too loud, too public. The thing had to be done, but should have been done with Italian diplomacy and French *finesse*. If she could but control her temper like this one—could be less of a virago and more of a great lady! His only quarrel

with Mary was fear of the graces which won him in spite of himself, and made the worse appear the better reason while she spoke and smiled. And unlike Elizabeth she showed no anger against him. He was a mouthpiece only.

"I welcome your safe return, monsieur, and thank you for your embassage. As to your Queen I shall speak plainly. There is nothing grieves me more than that I made any request of her, for I may well go to my kingdom without her leave. When I came here, a child, the English tried to catch me and failed. Let them try again. Sir, you have dwelt on the need of friendship between your Queen and me. Is this behaviour a sign that she desires it? She makes her friends of my rebel subjects and not with me their Queen. I know well the understanding between her and my rebels. Can you deny it?"

She was speaking with force and energy that he had never seen in her before, and it struck him speechless. So she knew that! How much else did she know? How far would it set her on guard where most they wished her defenceless? He knew there were spies at the English Court whom no wit could detect. Was it not believed that Elizabeth's "Robin" himself had eyes fixed on the idol of Europe in case his suit with Elizabeth should fail? Who could one trust but oneself in such a world of lies?

Waiting in vain for an answer Mary continued: "I ask nothing but friendship. I do not trick with her subjects nor trouble her kingdom—and yet I know—I *know*, that in her kingdom there are those who would accept offers if I made them!"

The glance that pointed this thrust was keen as a sword's edge, and he could plot no answer. It was true and might be even more terribly true than he guessed. Her look of triumph seemed to give her height and majesty as she ended, and this in spite of her sweet youth.

Throckmorton was compelled to answer for he had no instructions to break off relations; he stuttered out something about the stale question of bearing the English arms. Mary waved it gently aside. She knew by this time that Elizabeth would force a quarrel, do what she would. The Queen-Mother of France had worded the astonishment of all European princes in the remonstrance she addressed to Elizabeth on her intention of capturing a free and indepen-

dent ruler on the high seas, but in vain. What was the use of further words? She uttered her last remonstrance.

"Sir, it is useless to waste breath. I shall adventure, come what may. I go in the belief that she is determined to quarrel. Well—so be it! If the wind blows me on the coast of England then she may do her will and sacrifice me, for all I know, if she be so hard-hearted as to desire my death. Perhaps that might be better for me than to live. In this matter God's will be done."

She dismissed him, bowing with her usual sweetness, but there was a tone new to him, a deep foreboding of a dangerous future. That future indeed loomed blacker and blacker as the return to Scotland drew near, for it was her firm belief that as France sank under the horizon her happy days, her youth and all careless joy, would sink with it. There were moments when the voice of Doom tolled an everlasting "No" in her ear to forbid her going. Yet stay she could not. The past had broken under her; the future must be met with calm and constancy. As for him, he wrote half angrily, half warily to the English Privy Council:

> "I see her behaviour to be such, and her queenly modesty to be so great that she does not think herself to be too wise."

And again:

> "The Queen of Scotland bears herself so honourably and discreetly that I cannot but fear her progress."

Of that strange flash of prophecy which came from her she had planned nothing. To her it had always seemed reasonable and natural that they should live in peace, she as Elizabeth's heir if her determination to die a virgin were real—but in any case friends. She could not understand nor could Throckmorton declare to her that her offensive youth and beauty and fatal charm would have made the Englishwoman her enemy, even if heirship and religion had not existed. Yet that was the feminine element for which statesmen must allow, for it complicated every one of Elizabeth's thoughts and actions. Throckmorton knew that at that moment she was half insane with jealousy of

Mary's return to Scotland lest King Eric of Sweden who had been her suitor should turn his attentions to his lovely neighbour. He trembled to think what the result might be for the peace of the world if such a thing should happen. But what could he say? He bowed and muttered something to the effect that those who deserved his Mistress's friendship would be certain to secure it and so retreated from the room in disorder—for the first time in his life—realizing that Elizabeth was capable of putting her servants in positions from which no wit could extricate them. Several of the French lords laid hand to sword as he walked stiffly and alone past them.

"She desires my death, that woman," said Mary tragically to Mary Seton as she unfastened the black transparent veil which flowed so delicately about her large-eyed pallor. Mary Seton looked up with sparkling confidence.

"Let her try, the ugly red-haired witch! Mary Stuart will be a match for her and more! What! We have friends, I hope! We have moss-troopers on the Border. We have the clans—the Highland clans, and none truer in the wide world. We have the Edinburgh men-at-arms! O, my Lady, my liege, when they see your bonny face not a man of them all but will ride to hell at your bidding. Look at the Hamiltons—look at my own brave Setons! Come without a fear to your own people, my heart's darling, my Mary Stuart!"

It was like music to hear that passionate assurance. Some day it might comfort her, but at the moment the pang of leaving France was too sore. France itself would have come with her had that been possible. Chastelard the poet, Brantôme the historian, both would stake their lives on the adventure with the Queen of all Romance. Romance —that was what she meant to men—to all men who saw her except those pledged to another cause, and even of them many fell to the lure. It was laughable that Mary could afford to be careless of her choice of envoys to the English Court, but Elizabeth must think warily before she exposed any man to that soft fire. Only where money was the market could she outbid the beauty. That sharpened the arrow of her hate.

So with some of the noblest of France to keep her company Mary embarked in the ship which might lead her to an

English prison. The Marshal d'Amville was one, so madly her lover that in battle when retreating for his life he had returned, and all but flung it away to retrieve a little handkerchief of silk which she had dropped but had not even given him. It was indeed a band of lovers who followed her to that cold kingdom of the North—men who had dared the anger of the Regent Queen-Mother in asking permission to go.

She gave it scornfully, saying: "Yes, go! A glance of that girl's eyes is worth more than home or country or wife or decency to the men besotted on her, and she as cold as a woman cast in ice! I have known women more beautiful but none contents a man who has once seen her. What is it?"

So it was—the rose and white and golden Diane de Poitiers, who had won and held the love of two Kings of France, had charms more flamboyant, more luxuriant, but Mary was Mary—there could be no attempt at definition of that most winning beauty. To this day the charm can only be acknowledged. It cannot be captured.

She leaned on the rail of the ship at Calais, the last farewells said, the galley-slaves sitting to their oars; unfortunates upon whom her life and safety depended. Behind her were the Maries waving their own good-byes to the noble ladies, the light lovers, whom they would see no more. But she—her eyes glazed with tears fixed on no man, on no woman—only on the beloved land that had adopted her as a child, and sheltered and warmed her since with tender love and worship, her thoughts on her mother lying dead at Rheims in that sacred earth, the heart of her young King at Orleans in the country sanctified by the glory of Joan the Maid. What could matter but such memories as those of the love great and beautiful which France had given and received from her?

Chastelard with folded arms stood as near as he dared to watch what he called "the loveliness of her grief." He would turn it into verse that should last when the fair flesh was dust. Was it an omen that a boat trying to enter Calais struck on the bar and sank with wild cries from the men struggling in the sea with death?

Hands clasped she rushed to the stern calling on every gentleman of France and Scotland to save them, ready to

spring in herself to the rescue if they had not restrained her. He noted that also in the strange frenzy of the poet to whom all human agony and joy are but plastic clay to be moulded into beauty ; noted, too when it was too late and they had found the mercy of death, how her clasped hands and lips moving in prayer made her for the moment a saint beyond the reach of mortal passion—and then the human reaction —bitter weeping for these men—poor fishermen, so little to the great !

" My God, what a portent for our voyage ! "

But it was done. The oars plunged and France had become a memory most tragically sweet. She clung to the rails.

" I will not leave this deck, no, not while one sight of my France can be seen. Not the grand cabin below. Make me a tent on deck that all night I may see her in moonlight, and in the dawn still see her once more."

Many have loved France but none with a more poignant agony. It was said by Mary Seton and more that she left half her heart there for ever and ever. She knew well in that strange spirit of prophecy which sometimes inspired her that not all the years nor all her prayers would ever again restore that lost joy. Chastelard noted also—as what did he not note in her ?—how her eyes fell on the galley-slaves who were her safeguard, straining their hearts to bursting under the cruel lash of the overseer as he walked the deck. Criminals they might be but they had a place in her heart.

" Let the captain come here instantly ! " He could envy the captain her entreaty as he stood bare-headed before her.

" Captain, I cannot free these poor men but I can reward them. And to you I say that while I am aboard and *for ever* if you value a Queen's memory, the lash is to be laid aside. I answer for them that they will do their best, and more they cannot."

One of them heard. The news flew along the oar-benches, and they raised a wavering cheer for the Queen. There too —even there, thought Chastelard—that all-conquering grace justified itself, although she forgot them next moment in the vanishing dream of France.

He heard her murmur in the bitterness of her soul : " Farewell, my own France, my dear heart, my beloved,

farewell," as to a lover, so absorbed in sorrow that she neither knew nor cared who saw, who heard. All night she lay in the tent on deck watching for the first grey of dawn. Her ladies slept but not she—and he, watching also, saw her steal from its shelter that she might be alone in that last parting, salt and bitter as death, a farewell to youth.

The light touched France, cloudlike now on the horizon, faint as memory in age. Was it land, was it cloud or—nothing? Nothing. Never again to the end of time!

She covered her face with her hands and walked blindly to the tent. Could he sympathize? To him her agony was only another form of beauty—beauty unspeakable. A poet must rejoice that such things exist to enlighten the world. All true worshippers are cruel to all else than their deity.

Once they sighted the ships of Elizabeth watching sharp-eyed as her hate for the Scots Queen.

"Touch and go!" said Brantôme, standing beside him in the stern. "And if they get her the English will never set her free. A prison for her and a new chapter for my history. Pray, Master Chastelard, if you have a prayer anywhere up your sleeve, that the watchman may be asleep aboard the witch's war-dogs!"

"Of prayers I have not many!" Chastelard answered, "save to our Lady Venus, Star of the Sea—but her own beauty is her salvation. She needs no God. Look here!"

He pointed to the galley-slaves. They too had seen the danger. It did not need the empty-handed overseer as he walked his round to hearten them. They laughed aloud and bent their scarred backs to the oars as never yet. One man fainted and hung over his oar, a dead weight. His fellow with foam on his lips pulled for two. Yes, the English ships were hounds on the scent; they were setting every sail to catch the faint flicker of the breeze. Fainter and fainter it blew, the sails wrinkled, they hung flaccid—what could they do against the desperate resolve of the muscles of men? They told her. She came and leaned down like the compassion of God looking into the pit of hell to bless the lost souls. She stretched her hands laden with gratitude, and with no breath to cheer they pulled the harder.

Far behind the maddened English ships did their best, and it was nothing. They could not overhaul the flying galley.

And then again the heavens favoured her. As the men dropped all but dead over their oars, and indeed two bodies were cut loose from the benches and flung into the sea, that sea breathed up a faint grey vapour that dimmed and then obscured the waste of grey waters until they were one blank. Dimmer and dimmer grew the shadowy English ships losing themselves in the vast twilight of the ocean. So strange and uncanny was it that voices softened as the fog thickened, silently muting all sound, and they were alone in a world not so large as the galley's length and beam.

"Enough is as good as a feast!" said Brantôme to Chastelard, hugging his fur mantle about him, for the sea's breath was dank and raw from her deepest depths. "If this lasts and the captain loses his noddle, which if I mistake not he has already done, we stand a very fair chance of leaving our bones among the rocks of that highly unpleasant country Scotland. Therefore that chapter of my history will not be written in which I hoped to commend the courage of this lady which indeed excels that of other women. I was standing by once when her uncle the Constable de Montmorency said to her: 'My niece, I am of opinion that like the men of our race you would know how to die extremely well in battle—an accomplishment rare for a lady. And so also said your uncle the Duc de Guise.' Her eyes shone but she made no answer."

"Her eyes still shine!" answered Chastelard. "We shall see no stars to steer by in this fog, but what need of them with such beacons?"

Brantôme looked at him with his wise humorous smile.

"Yes, we shall reach Scotland, I believe, but when we reach it, beware, my friend! They do not there understand the lover of romance who asks only a smile. Keep your head in both senses of the word!"

Chastelard turned angrily away. There were moments when he hated the ironic historical pose of Brantôme, who in return called him "the lunatic poet" and really did him little wrong. He was right; the fog did its work too thoroughly, and two days later it lifted its grey pall and lo!—they were among the barbed rocks of the coast of Scotland—reckoning adrift, certainty nowhere, but that they had escaped the witch's war-dogs.

Chastelard rushed to Mary's side only to find d'Amville

there before him, steadfast in guard upon her as she stood with her Maries, Mary Seton holding a casket of jewels under her arm from which nothing would part her.

"I will die sooner," she said as Chastelard would have taken it, "for this contains the jewel of all others which Her Majesty values next to her marriage ring, namely the fair diamond that the King her husband gave her at their betrothal. And if she would be said by me she would never venture a second marriage, for she is by nature so gentle and trusting as to be the prey of any ambitious and cruel man who wishes to make his market of her beauty and her crown."

Brantôme standing by smiled even in that moment of peril at the mingled feelings in Chastelard's face. He was no advocate for the marriage of his inspiration with an adoring lover, mad with jealousy of the very dog who lay at her feet, and yet still less could he abide the thought of the loveliest lady of her time frozen in life-long celibacy.

"Cruel demoiselle!" he said bitterly to Mary Seton, "and is this your counsel to the Queen? Have you forgotten that you and your three sister maids of honour are vowed to be celibate yourselves until she shall marry? And do you all four resolve to condemn the world to the extinction of hope because she has a heart of marble?"

Mary Seton turned her bright cold glance upon him.

"I speak for none but myself when I say that in all the world the man does not breathe for whom I would sacrifice the service of my Mistress. And I say no man worthy of her breathes on this earth, and that if he did and were present he would busy himself with a boat to save her life instead of talking like a mad poet."

Brantôme smiled dryly.

"The lady speaks very truly, monsieur, and if I am not mistaken I see what looks like a fisherman's boat, which may yet save our Lady from rocks as cruel as the tender mercies of the Queen of England."

It was true. A boat-load of honest fishermen had stopped their work of hauling in a net, amazed by the strange ship and the richness of the men and women aboard her. The news was carried to Mary.

"Ask them the direction to Leith Harbour," was all she said. "If we are to die we die, and for my part I care little

enough now unless my life is of some use to Scotland, for I have lost all else."

But at that moment life was decreed, for the fishermen, richly rewarded, piloted them from the dangers and set them in a fair way for Leith, and there a week sooner than she was expected, since she had embarked earlier to outwit Elizabeth's snares, Mary Stuart set foot on Scottish soil after as desperate an adventure as the heart of any man could desire or any woman fear. And all the Queen of England had gained was a ship-load of horses and splendid trappings for the Scots Queen's use, and the general dislike and contempt of Europe for a dirty trick upon the beauty of the world.

CHAPTER VI

BUT she must set her teeth to endure, when landing in the grey dank mist she saw the pitiful train of half-starved nags with ragged saddles sent to convey the Queen of Scotland and her train to Edinburgh on hearing her own were lost. The red blood flushed her face with shame that the nakedness of the land and its scoring poverty should be so openly displayed, and for the moment she hated her brother.

To Mary Seton who rode at her bridle rein she spoke in a bitter whisper: "To think he could do no better than this! It was a proud thing to be Queen of Scotland in France, but O, to think the French lords should know what it is in truth! See them sneering and laughing at the poor little *garrons!* O if I had wings to fly away to my Touraine from this cold bitter inhospitable shore!"

It was a girl's lament not a woman's and yet most natural. Cold rain soaked into their bones, cold mists dank as death veiled the raw country-side, and the miserable ponies stood drooping in ragged harness in the general wretchedness, a part and symbol of it all. At the moment she loathed her kingdom and blushed scarlet for its ignominies.

Mary Seton drew coldly away. She was not the girl to accept contempt for her country and least of all from its Queen.

"I am ashamed for you, Mary Stuart! Is it like a Queen to trouble for a paltry pony and saddle? May you never have worse to blush for! You are a week beforehand with them—and whose fault is that? Scotland is a poor country, but you know well there are brave hearts here to love and serve you, and I take that for more than a padded saddle and a prancing horse. Let them see you have a heart above the like trash—the poor laddies with their eyes on you!"

That was the right note. She lifted her head with spirit and laughed on the men about her. Chastelard's gay velvet doublet was absurd on the tattered little pony's shaggy back. D'Amville's long legs touched the ground on his; he hunched his knees in vain. Brantôme had the appearance of a colossus overweighting the small beast padding along beneath him. Mary Beton rode with an air of thwarted pride—shutting haughty eyelids over the flame in her eyes with a "Laugh if you dare!" which was unspeakably comic. Mary Fleming and Mary Livingstone rode side by side, heads hung down and eyes fixed on the ragged ears before them, half dead with shame. The Mary of Maries laughed aloud, a ringing laugh, and clapped her gloved hands at the head of the disconsolate party.

"Lucky we are that have four feet each to carry us instead of our own two, for they never dreamt to see their Queen this day! I welcome you to Scotland, my lords and ladies. To hard living and gay adventure and the open moors and sport and dance and merriment. And if that is not good enough for any man or woman let them make sail for France. Hands up for Scotland!"

Not a man or woman but accepted the gay challenge, and hands were flung in the air as they set out for Edinburgh town with the news flying before them on a hundred bare running feet that the Queen was come.

Out poured the people from every village they passed, falling in behind and around her, mad with eagerness to see the face whose fame rang round the world. "Lord save us! The bonny bonny lass!" they cried, and the shouting grew and the volume of cheering men and women, and so in an avalanche of loyalty and wonder they descended in an invading host on Edinburgh. Out poured the Lord Provost and the bailies in hastily assumed robes of office. Out poured the guilds, the honest citizens; their pretty daughters—those young plants of grace in sober dresses suited to the discouraging spirit of gravity spread abroad by sour Master John Knox and his serious Reformers. It was indeed sin in his eyes to be young or beautiful or happy.

Yet even those lowering brows smiled at the sight of their laughing Queen come among them in the perfect flower of womanhood—she, born in such cruel tempests of war, whose mother had discharged her great office with such

courage. She came to them unguarded, offering them her love with the gladdest, most confident smiles, assured of theirs, with looks that besought their kindness and promised her own in return. And she had known sorrow. Those lovely eyes were scarcely dry from tears for her lost husband, her lost kingdom of France. They would be good to her ; she should forget ! She should not suffer ! Eighteen ! Not too late for joy to begin and a prosperous reign and a loving people.

So they thought while watching that young flush of gladness. The very sorriness of her ponies and train touched them. She had been in such haste to come to them that she had not delayed for the pomps of a Queen. She should have them later and to her heart's desire, and well indeed she would become them.

They reached her palace of Holyrood, low-lying, grey in its dignified solitude, as if, holding its pride apart, it brooded darkly over the tragic memories of the stormy past. That was better in her eyes—the sinister majesty of the dark palace was the right setting for the splendours her rich French dowry would confer upon it.

" And thanks be to the Blessed Virgin that I do not come empty-handed ! " she said softly to Mary Seton. " Scotland has no riches to support a Queen's pomps and pride. But I bring gold and plenty in my hand, and Holyrood shall sparkle and outshine my good cousin of England's Greenwich and Hampton Court. We will make it beautiful, Mary Seton ; so beautiful that all the world shall come to see ! "

Exultation uplifted her quick variable spirit now because the people crowded and praised her, and because Holyrood lay dark and majestic in the setting sun and was her own and no husband's gift.

For what was left of the day folks crowded under the palace windows, shouting to see her, and when darkness fell and she had eaten her first meal in her own house and sat smiling nervously now, half worn out with excitement, there began an appalling serenade under her window, sounding as though all the saucepans and kettles of Edinburgh had been gathered in one crash-band to do honour to the returning ruler. They were fiddles and rebecks no doubt, but as the melody developed it seemed that every cat in Edinburgh had joined its voice to the tumult. Heavens,

what could it be! Was it a premeditated insult of jeering and mockery? It sounded uncommonly like it. If so . . . But no—slowly, solemnly, nasal and strident, voices emerged, chanting a funereal strain.

"I think," said Mary Seton doubtfully, "that it will be one of the Psalms of David. Master John Knox has commended the use of only such words for the enjoyment of the godly. We must endure it, Madam."

"Indeed! I consider it a very worthy and moving homage" cried Mary with spirit. Not even the appalling disharmony wounding her sensitive ear should wring a criticism from her. Chastelard frowned until his eyebrows knotted. The barbarians! The Scots savages! What a homage to beauty and royalty!

The Lord my shepherd is,
And nothing shall I lack;
He leadeth me for His
Along a grassy track.

It droned on intolerably and Mary sat resolute, fighting the longing to stop her ears and escape.

"I shall sit here until it is done, and pay them with my best thanks and a drink of something heartening. The poor souls! It is their best! They would do better if they could."

"If you sit here, my royal sister, till it is done, you will sit until to-morrow morning," said a grave voice behind her chair.

A man had entered unheard, clothed in dark rich damask with a close feathered cap in his hand. A tall man, light-haired and of a fair freckled complexion, light eyes set close together in a narrow sinister forehead, but with an air of breeding and command which would have stamped him anywhere as a person of consideration—her base-born brother James Stuart, who was to visit his father's sin upon himself and her in many and strange ways, the man who in every night's dream saw himself King of Scotland. She loved him as she was ready to love all who showed her any kindness, and sprang to meet him, drawing his face up after he had kissed her hand that she might kiss his cheek.

"I am right glad to see you, brother! You would have

been at Leith if you had known I could slip with such ease and speed through the English net! Come, sit by me and when the Psalm is done we will show ourselves together at the window."

"It will never be done," he answered seriously, "that is, until to-morrow morning. It is a compliment to Your Majesty and must be taken as such. Master John Knox has commended the Psalms to the earnest study of the people, and they are sung now at all weddings and rejoicings according to the text: 'If any be merry let him sing Psalms.' I own it appears reasonable."

"No doubt," said Mary faintly, "but all night! And my sleeping-room is this way. They are at my very chamber window."

"As a serenade should be, Madame," Chastelard interposed with bitter sarcasm. "It is not the fashion after which we serenaded you in France. My own poor words——"

James Stuart shot a glance, quickly veiled, of utter distrust and dislike. One might have to endure these French *mignons* for the moment but he meant that their shrift should be short indeed. Pack the fools and fiddlers back to France, and leave the unsworded Queen to him!

"Scotland is Scotland and France France!" he said sententiously, "and if Her Majesty approves the serenade it is good enough. May I counsel you to sleep early, Madam, for to-morrow there is much business to discuss and you are wearied."

She agreed, rising hastily, and all dispersed. But in her chamber alone with Mary Seton, with the bellowing of the Psalms in their barbarous Scots so deafening that they filled the air with a very fury of cacophony, she put her mouth to the ear of Mary Seton as the only means of making her hear, and asserted: "You do not like my brother James. You do not trust him. And why?"

"For reasons good and many," replied the girl with her usual frank indiscretion. "Bend your ear and I'll tell you. I cannot scream like a gull against the gale. Because you are Mary Stuart and he is James Stuart, and the man is base-born and disinherited and the royal woman rules him and takes and gives as she will. Can a man bear that easily, and especially a man deep-plotting and treacherous by

nature? He will rule Scotland first through and then without you. The Setons know him, as they have reason. For God's sake trust him in nothing!"

It was impossible to speak with dignity in the roar:

Lift up your heads, ye gates of gold,
The King shall enter in.

But she did her best to assert her perfect love and trust of the narrow-eyed batch of half-brothers and the haughty half-sister whom her father's amours had given her. She did believe in them for hers was an easy heart to win, and she intended to make it clear that the bar sinister was no bar to natural affection. But it was impossible to protest against the bellowing under the window and Mary Seton stuck her fingers in her ears and laughed, and the dispute ended in an exhausted Queen creeping into bed, if sleep could be had in it, under her grand emblazoned coverlet of purple velvet, with the gold crown gathering the curtains into glimmering amethyst folds. But the Psalms redoubled in vigour as more and more Reformers added themselves to the crowd beneath. Beautiful and winning their Queen might be, but she must not forget that she was an unregenerate Romish Jezebel as yet, and it would be an act of duty to attack her ear with psalms echoing the militant spirit of the very much Reformed God of Master John Knox! He would have spurned a Jew to the stake and yet out-Jehovahed their Jehovah. The very thought spurred the singers on to miracles of endurance. Brantôme, sitting sleepless in his own chamber, using language sadly out of harmony with that which rent the ear of night, wrote a paragraph in the new chapter of his history.

> *"There came under her window five or six hundred ragamuffins of that town who gave her a concert of the vilest fiddles and little rebecks, which are as bad as they can be in that country, and accompanied them by singing psalms, but so wretchedly that nothing could be worse. Ah, what melody it was! What a lullaby for the night!"*

"She can never stand this country!" he thought. "We must have her again in France. Better marry some true

French nobleman and send a son trained to the manner of ruling these barbarians, than waste such heavenly beauty and intellect on the impossible. And to-morrow she must grimace and thank the brutes for their howling."

He was right. Pale from sleeplessness she had to appear at the window next day and tender gracious thanks to the shouting crowd.

"My good lieges, I thank you for your melody of last night, which I enjoyed with all my heart as to its manner and matter. I ask you to continue it this night also if that be your pleasure as it is mine."

"But Your Majesty did not think they had lungs left to accept your invitation!" said Mary Livingstone mischievously next evening, when it broke forth again like the braying of millions of donkeys. Mary was past jesting.

"For the love of God, change my room to another," was all she could say, "for nothing will stop them but the last Trumpet unless it were my death; which is much to be wished!"

But next day and for some days to come things bettered on that harsh welcome. Great noblemen came crowding to give her welcome from their castles and towers and the fair priories and abbacies filched from her dying Church. Their eager wives and daughters crowded up in the best imitation of French fashions they could muster to see their French Queen and her ladies, and pass them and their dresses in review. It would set the fashions for the next ten years. Holyrood was a gay tumult of coming and going, and clashing swords and ringing spurs and jests and oaths of merry men-at-arms in the courtyards.

But Buchanan her tutor, also an exile from France, who was beginning to plumb the depths of public opinion and to study the deep intrigues between England and certain of the Scots nobility whose poverty craved English gold, was making notes all the time for his own guidance and that of others. He began to doubt very gravely whether events much other than appeared were not hatching under that gay surface. All were crowding to see and welcome her and that was natural enough for, as he wrote: "The excellency of her mien, the delicacy of her beauty, the freshness of her blooming years, and the elegancy of her wit recommended her to all." But to his keen eye the formation of two strong

parties was visible in a deep fissure under the surface of unity. And the one part was headed by an inexperienced girl, and the other by the bastard brother James Stuart whom she was to create Earl of Moray as a token of her love—Moray, a man deep, astute, experienced in intrigue, a bitter foe to the Catholics on whose lands and Church estates he had fattened, and moreover with Elizabeth's purse to back him in England and the powerful Master John Knox in Scotland, who had captured the consciences of the Scots people as rigorously as any Pope or prelate of the Catholic Church. Elizabeth, Moray and John Knox, so Buchanan ranged the Trinity of Evil for Scotland. And a girl against them. It followed that it would perhaps be wise for a tutor to royal personages who had his way to make in the world to stint a little in his praises of the young Queen, until he saw better which way the cat was likely to jump. It had been politic to sing them *fortissimo* in France where all adored her. Would it be so in Scotland ?

Sunday morning dawned on the Chapel Royal of Holyrood, prepared for what Moray called in his own heart " the mummery of the Mass," as he strode up the great stair to his sister. To him religion meant nothing spiritually. Intellectually, a useful disguise for men's thoughts and an apology for their actions, no more than that, but politically it was mighty, an engine of terrible force to be used in driving the wills of men in whatever direction an astute ruler desired. One must stoop to conquer, one must shout with the biggest crowd, one must out-pious the most pious and in that way bring them to heel. But at that moment like her old tutor Buchanan, Moray himself was uncertain of his course. So much depended on her marriage. Suppose she married the eldest son of Spain or some other mighty monarch ? She could crush him. He dared not defy her yet. And again—would John Knox with his gloomy theology, his eternal hell aflame, his precarious and difficult heaven, capture the dour obstinacy in the Scottish people and rule them through it, or would the amazing grace and charm of the girl on the throne enlist the nobility of Scotland under her banner, and restore the feudal aristocracy with all its powers and privileges in the very teeth of the dogged democracy which was coming in with the Reformers ? He pondered the matter deeply under the

concealing smile upon his narrow jaws as he kissed her hand and then her cheek, and asked how she did, with the forced brotherly note in his voice. But his eyes to those who can read men were a rat's eyes watching from his safe hole.

"Well, brother, and very well, and now give me your arm and lead me to the Chapel Royal—there to hear Mass and thank God for my safe arrival and prosperous beginning. Come, lords and ladies all!"

They were assembled, men and women, watching the face of Moray to see how he would take it—he who had suffered public rebuke from Master Knox and accepted it meekly. Would he dare go to the Mass? Would he defy the Queen? They did not know their Moray.

He stood leaning on his sword.

"Madam, it is true I assured Your Majesty in France that you would have the freedom of worship for yourself and your followers but yet, trust me, I think you will do wisely to delay the privilege. There is thunder in the air. The Scots people take kindly to no priest. They will not be commandeered to heaven, and so you will find it, I fear."

She answered temperately as heart could wish, but firmly, and with a heart that beat double strokes beneath her black robe.

"My lord, I commandeer none. Let each find his road to heaven. But I too will keep my own. Again I ask your arm to the Chapel Royal."

Instead of moving, he flung up his hand in a quick gesture to call attention. There was a roar of cries and shoutings outside, the noise of a great and angry crowd trampling into the courtyard of the palace, the sharp cry of a man as though in desperate fear and agony.

She rushed to the window with Moray at her shoulder, followed by the rest.

A man in knightly armour led them, brandishing his sword, shrieking and yelling threats. A knot of the crowd were struggling over another fighting for his life against fearful odds. With an impression of confused horror only, she turned on Moray.

"What is it? Send out and save the poor wretch. What is it? Cowards—wolves! Who leads them? So many to one!"

"Lord Lindsay of the Byres and a man of proved worth

and fidelity!" he answered gravely. "And what he shouts is: 'The idolater priest shall die the death!' Be warned, Madam! There should be no Mass to-day."

"There shall and will!" she cried, "if there is a priest in Scotland to say it! What is this? My father, *mon père*, how have these devils used you?"

For faint, bleeding and tattered, a man rushed into the great and splendid room and fell exhausted at her feet, a pitiable figure indeed. It was the good old Father Ambrose who had served her in France, himself a Scotsman of noble birth, and now thus brutally used by his own countrymen. She knelt beside him with quivering lips but otherwise calm.

"Father, you will forgive the offenders as I forgive them, as the Mother of Sorrows forgives them. But we will hear the Mass to-day if we die for it, you and I together. You cannot say it but you will bless the Chapel Royal with your holy presence. Send for Father Lawrence, Mary Seton instantly, and bathe my father's forehead with the essence in my *gibecière*."

He lay recovering—Moray looking down upon him with an immovable expression impossible to decipher—then rose slowly and unsteadily to his feet.

"Madam, the Mass shall be said before Your Majesty this day and I myself will say it. You say true. We forgive our enemies. They know not what they do. I follow Your Majesty."

She put her arm through Moray's and walked on proudly, followed by all. At the door of the chapel she looked up in his face.

"Brother, will you enter?"

He disengaged his arm.

"Madam, that is impossible because I am by no means assured that the crowd will not break in upon your devotions. I will guard the door."

They trooped in, and Mary Seton, unable to concentrate upon music and chanting considered his attitude in the deeps of her heart. She did not trust a word, a look of the man's. The Setons knew him too well. That last was a masterpiece of dissimulation. He would guard the door for the Queen's sake! Yes, she would remember that gratefully! But to John Knox and the Reformers he would

say: "I would not enter the cursed place of idolatry, not I! I would stand only at the door to guard the Queen as is my duty. For her idolatry she will get no more of me than that!"

Whatever might be Mary Seton's opinion as to second marriage it had taken very few days in Scotland to convince her that the Queen must have a husband, strong, wise and true, royal in means and power, who would have the strength to hold both parties in check and blend them into unison for the sake of Scotland, England and Europe. A man too to understand and mend the causes of the dire poverty of the country. But where could that paragon be found? What foreign king would serve? The Scots nobles would never brook a Catholic nor would Elizabeth, sitting like a spider in her web in London. And how could a Protestant be possible? Mary Stuart herself would never endure a heretic in her bosom.

"Perhaps after all she had best give up this stormy crown and settle in France and send her children to rule here!" she thought, rising after the last Latin prayer which dismissed the congregation. "It is too hard a task for a woman, and she as gentle and sweet and wise as any princess in romance. But not with the wisdom of swords and cunning! God help her! What shall she do?"

What she did was to send immediately a Proclamation to the Market Cross of Edinburgh there to be affixed for the information of all the city. It proclaimed flatly that her determination was to compose all the religious distractions and quarrels of her realm. That she would neither interrupt nor interfere with the form of religion which she had found established there upon her return, and would punish with death any attempt on the part of any person to molest it. But that for herself she claimed the same liberty of conscience to follow her own faith, and therefore commanded her subjects not to molest nor trouble any of her servants nor those who had accompanied her out of Paris, under the same penalty.

It was a proclamation that no sovereign but herself could or would have issued at that time. Her sweet-spirited and courteous tolerance set her so far in advance of her age that men could not comprehend her attitude,

and thought it weakness and cunning waiting its moment to pounce. It was far enough from that. She considered Knox's doctrines pestilent, dangerous and disorganizing to a State, and had justification for the latter opinion in events that followed. The world has not even yet got to the end of the road of democracy. It was only entering upon it then. But, so far as the Reformers' religious opinions went they were theirs, and if that was all their ignorance could accept let them go their way. In her opinion a sojourn in Purgatory would let in the light upon their darkened and narrow soul-prisons. But for herself—she would hold on the ancient way illuminated by the great lights of the saints whom all Christendom revered. They aureoled and haloed her path, and she asked no question but followed as beseemed a crowned and royal daughter of the Church Catholic.

She spoke of this to Brantôme one evening as she sat in the great embrasure of one of the windows, adding: "You will think it strange, my friend, but this struggle gives me the first joy I have had in Scotland. One may gnaw one's heart over little things, but the great are a trumpet-call to the battle-field where to fight and triumph or fight and die are the rewards, and I do not know which is the greater. I have half forgotten France—no, not my gratitude, never that! I could as soon forget my natural mother. I mean the idle joy I took there, for I was a child then. I am a woman now. I see that many men have many minds, and though I loathe Knox's opinions and think them ruinous to the State I cannot believe you can change a man's opinions by torturing his body."

A woman! He could have smiled, thinking of her eighteen years—but yet on second thought—it was true in certain ways. She who had been all laughter and candour was assuming a reserve and gravity he had never suspected in her. Courage he had always allowed her, and a certain gallant dash and daring like a princely boy's, but wisdom—behind so white a brow? He scarcely knew what to make of this new Mary as yet.

He answered gravely: "Madam, you are right. But, whether in practice—! Master Knox's teachings upset the authority of Kings, indeed any authority but his own interpretation of a God whom decent men should scorn.

But our Queen Catherine would have him broken on the wheel! Go warily, I beseech you."

She sighed and made no reply, but confirmed all men's notion of her courage by commanding a visit from the terrible John Knox. Indeed it astonished himself. He sharpened his weapons for the attack as though she had been a council of grave doctors of the Church in session. Certainly theological questions were to be discussed, and what hope could she have of controverting his arguments, his fiery flow of eloquence which no notions of courtesy or fair fighting could restrain, and above all his deep and rooted contempt for her sex? Might it not even be possible that he might overpower her and lead her captive as a royal brand plucked from the burning? Then indeed, if certain of her entire obedience to his policy, he might be the most loyal and influential of her subjects in a happy future. He said as much to Moray who by no means loved him and would have dreaded such a combination as a death-blow to his own hopes. He shook his head sadly.

"I fear, Master Knox, you will find her an unpersuaded princess. Nor did she consider the belabouring of her priest the theological argument that perhaps she should. Indeed, she had the malice to question its Christianity!"

For the life of him he could not forbear that barbed dart. It did not however pierce Knox's hide. He smiled with complacent satisfaction.

So with his clasped Bible under his arm he set forth to the assault not as yet having seen his antagonist, but in virtue of her royalty comparing himself to the young David advancing upon the evil Goliath.

Goliath received him robed in black to the feet, and more, sleeved in black to the wrists, a black transparent veil falling from her coif of lawn and enveloping her in cloudy folds, the sole ornament about two inches of a row of large pearls disclosed by her ruff. Even his rigidity could not complain of lasciviousness of attire. She was stitching at embroidery in a frame with the design propped before her to work from, and two of the Maries also in black stood behind her chair. He bowed as if on creaking hinges and waited.

Mary's eye, keen as soft, spied the Bible stored under his arm and swift as a ship on the wind changed her course. No

religious argument for her with the sour-faced bigot ! Half rising, she bowed and re-seated herself, motioning him to a chair beside her and herself opened the attack.

"Master Knox, I have desired to see you relative to a book which I am told you have written and which does you little credit. The name itself is an offence to my good sister of England and to me for it is called 'First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment (or Rule) of Women.' What right have you, being my subject, so to speak of the just and lawful authority of women as rulers ? I desire your full reply."

Full it was, flowing and impassioned. Jezebel and Athaliah adorned it. She bore it with composure, secretly rejoicing that she had diverted him to earthly concerns, and made no answer except that of gently shaking her head now and again at his scorn of her sex and office.

"Women," he almost shouted at the end of his tirade rising hawk-like in his black wide-winged robe and pouncing over her, "are excluded alike by the law of nature and their weakness and the law of God as expressed by Paul from ruling as kings. It is a disgrace to——"

She cut across him with a clear question much to the point.

"You think then that I have no just authority ?" And so took the wind out of his sails that he sat down discomfited for a moment, and Mary Seton's fingers tightened with triumph on the back of her chair.

She had him on the horns of a dilemma. To deny her authority would be treason. Her party as yet was strong enough to see to his punishment. To affirm it would be to stultify the book which he had said was unanswerable in Europe and the world.

He temporized—a painful expedient for him—but left a sting in the tail of his sentence.

"If the country approves Your Grace's rule, I content myself with living under it as Paul did under the Emperor Nero's. And that is all I can say."

There was that in his hard grey eye which might have warned her that he would never forgive that small defeat, and the comparison of herself with Nero was as offensive as it could be. But she took it in silence.

Not for nothing had the new English Ambassador

Randolph written of her: "She is patient and bears much."

It may have been her silence which caused Knox to add: "My hope is that so long as you do not defile your hands with the blood of saints that neither I nor that book shall hurt you, for it was written against that Jezebel—Bloody Mary of England—who set the fires alight to roast them for their true worship."

And so into another long tirade which she still heard patiently, having laid aside her work and sitting with her chin upon her hand, elbow propped on the arm of her great carved chair. In truth she was thinking how heavy, how all but impossible, her task in Scotland! What use bright wit, tolerance, patience, and a loving heart against bigotry, fanaticism, and hatred? She looked at him almost with despair at his folly as he raged and shouted and raged, and did not cease until Mary Seton standing with the stiffness of a graven image warned her that dinner was at hand.

When he was gone she said wearily to the girl: "What chance have I? I let them go their way and they would force *me* to follow it. Is there no patience, no gentleness in all the world but mine? Alas, that I was born to put a most crooked world straight and cannot. Yet I could make them glad if gladness is in them."

And he, meeting Moray at the foot of the great stairs and questioned by him eagerly as to the meeting, answered scornfully: "If she has not a proud mind, a crafty wit and a heart hardened against God and His truth, my judgment is at fault."

She had made an enemy of the most powerful man in her kingdom. It was to influence Moray's conduct profoundly. He heard the verdict with joy.

CHAPTER VII

BUT there were gaiety and grace as well as political and religious rancour, and Mary would wake in the mornings to a delightful sense of the duty of making her house so beautiful that all should own her taste and imagination, and be softened and civilized by its manifestation. The stately rooms and galleries lent themselves very well to the rich furnishing which Elizabeth had not been able to intercept as she had done the horses. Mary and her Maries flitted through the reception rooms planning, commanding, putting the finishing touches to the grand receptions to be given to her loyal subjects. She herself could not shine in queen's raiment for the French Queen must still wear her weeds for the French King, therefore her palace must sparkle for her. It was a pretty sight to see the band of girls with the most beautiful leading them, but each feeling herself a hostess and responsible as they took their final survey.

"Beautiful!" pronounced proud Mary Beton, "worthy of our Mistress and I can say no more. Mr. Randolph will find even the splendour of Greenwich and Hampton Court outshone by our French taste which is the first in the world and none second. And how this barbarous Scotland needs it!"

Mr. Randolph, a fine courtly smooth-spoken Englishman with an eye to pierce an oak beam to the sights he desired, was the brand-new English Ambassador to the Court of Scotland—Mary's old enemy Throckmorton remaining now in London and in high favour with Elizabeth to direct operations in Scotland from head-quarters. It was hinted already among the courtiers that Mary Beton's fine eyes had launched a shaft at Randolph's well-guarded breast which trembled at all events in the outer ring. She was conscious herself of a rising flush when he entered—perfumed and bowing—the perfect courtier.

Yes, the rooms were beautiful! The great tables of carven oak were draped with rich velvet board-cloths heavily fringed with gold. Some had been brought from England by that sister of the Eighth Henry from whom Mary Stuart derived her claim to the throne of England. The old walls were hung with rayed cloth of gold, and from the looms of Arras came noble designs in tapestry—one of the Lady Venus landing from the sea in her great fluted shell, so wistful and beautiful that it might have been taken as a parable of late events, had not her Goddesship worn a little less than Mary's majestic robe and floating veil—now black against the golden walls.

There were the newly introduced sofas heaped with the luxury of Turkish cushions, and no rushes disfigured the floor of Mary's galleries or entangled themselves in the trains of the ladies' brocades. Those oaken floors were covered with Turkish rugs seemingly too beautiful to tread upon. Randolph owned to Mary Beton that Elizabeth herself had not the like at Greenwich. Also there were delicious feminine touches, strange at first and contemptible to the old school of Scots nobles who had been used to the bare and draughty chambers of their fierce old castles. For on the marble tables drawn aside to make room for gay crowds were chess-boards with miraculously carved kings and queens in ivory, white or stained with rose, and beside them porcelain vases delicate as egg-shell, some, it was whispered, from an unknown and almost unheard-of land called Cathay. And beside them clocks set with gems in flowers and scrolls, made only to strike happy hours for those wealthy ones whose joy no sorrow could ever invade.

At the upper end of the great hall was a raised dais, and upon it the Queen's chair of state under a most glorious canopy blazoned with the royal arms of France, Scotland and England, and, written along the front the strange motto she had chosen for herself to be her guide.

"In My End is My Beginning."

Many read it and none, not even the keen English envoys, could read its meaning. It would take subtlety more than theirs to decipher her conviction that the Gate of Death is the Way of Life.

She sat enthroned with Moray her brother beside her, and the Maries at each side of her chair as the company entered, dumb with amazement at the flush of youth and splendour that grim old Holyrood had taken on. For each stiff noble leading his wife to presentation she had some kindly word and smile a little beyond the common of what other monarchs might say and do. It was the kind heart burning to set all at their ease, to make charm flower along the way she walked, for her own happiness as theirs. Randolph noted it as he bowed before her, contrasting it with Elizabeth's manner, a little too royally stiff on the one hand, and very much too familiar on the other for a lady who claimed the crowned virginity of the world. On that delicate point he had no convictions but was assured that Elizabeth had the qualities which make for worldly success, and the question interesting him now was whether Mary might be credited with the same. Was she really as simple in her charm as appeared? In his world every civility had an interested meaning. Was it so here, or was she glad and kind and confident in earnest? If so, she was an easy prey. His intimacy with the handsomest of her Maries might be useful indeed if it gave him insight there. For if she had cunning as well as grace it would be a struggle to the death between these two women for supremacy in Europe and therefore in the world.

"Your Queen looks younger than her years, which God knows are few enough," he said admiringly to Mary Beton, when the presentations were over and the guests grouping about the rooms and galleries, the Queen among them with Moray at her elbow and Chastelard haunting as near as he dared. And seeing him, a frown drew in Mary Beton's brows, for his infatuation had become so overwhelming that the man had lost all sense of the outer world, and saw only himself with his divinity shining serenely above him as a moon in winter skies. Already whispers were circulating and, though none of the wildest could touch her honour, her love of poetry and the beautiful in all its forms induced her to admit the madman to her inner circle where the music in which she delighted, literature and all the rays of its eternal sunshine, were the only subjects that pleased. She would lean her head upon the violet and golden cushions lost in a dream of France, while Chastelard low-voiced,

sang Ronsard's or his own lyrics—often addressed to the Queen herself, plucking hints of harmony from the lute to accompany his golden baritone, dreaming awake also, drowned in her beauty. A dangerous business with Moray's cold eye upon him and the jealousies of the world on guard!

Mary Beton caught the flash of Randolph's sleek mischievous glance and trembled to think that story might be reported in England, and Elizabeth triumph in the thought that another great lady had her chamber favourites also. She would venture a word.

They were dancing the Purpose—a stately minuet or *pavane* which afforded the happiest chances for coquetry, by obliging intervals of talk between partners in some secluded nook before they swam into the light again. It was perhaps with a view to the Purpose that the Maries had arranged so many fascinating and shadowy nooks in the great gallery and halls as would have made John Knox's hair stand rigid with suspicious fury. She and Randolph sat in one now where a great golden banner with the Lion of Scotland drooped over one side of their retreat, and a *paravent* or folding screen with French lilies in gold was on the other.

The Queen, who was dancing the Purpose with Chastelard as she had done once before in Paris where a poet was honoured as a king, passed them with him, laughing and waving her hand to Mary Beton. Chastelard with feverish eyes and lips followed, seeing none but his liege lady in all the world, and Randolph's eyes made quiet note. He was mentally composing his despatch to Elizabeth.

"A handsome man!" he said carelessly. "In that *pourpoint* of black slashed with silver he reminds me of a portrait I saw in Italy when I made that tour. A favourite of an Italian ruling Duchess who came with him to a bad end."

Mary Beton's stately throat bridled in her ruff.

"There is no other likeness than the face, Mr. Randolph. Our Queen makes no favourites but she loves poetry and music as simply as a child. Monsieur de Chastelard sings as divinely as Apollo and——"

Randolph laughed teasingly.

"And looks as divine as Apollo when he sings. Don't frown. Song itself is set off by a handsome face, and no

doubt your Queen thinks so too. I can answer that *my* Queen does."

She resented the comparison as who would not who had heard the stories of Elizabeth which circulated at the French Court? But they could not be hinted to the English Ambassador.

She said with dignity: "The pleasure is on the side of Monsieur de Chastelard, for to look at our Queen is an inspiration to lute and words and——"

"And to more. Much more!" Randolph interrupted teasingly.

She flushed with nervousness at the hint in his voice—the very note she wished to silence for ever. Pure as snow the Queen's reputation had come through the iniquities of the French Court. Pure as snow it must remain.

"At all events his pleasure will soon end!" she said with tartness which did not escape Randolph's notice. "For the Queen has decided that all the French folk must leave for France. She knows that Queens must not keep foreigners about them. It causes jealousies and of course Monsieur de Chastelard goes with the rest."

"She is very well advised in that decision, though they invariably return," Randolph said gravely, and whether he alluded to Chastelard or to the general principle Mary Beton could not for the life of her tell. She was struggling like a pretty fly in a cobweb for he always led and directed the conversation.

"I could wish that one or two Queens I know had *your* dignity, Mistress Mary!" he said abruptly. "They think the distance between them and the rest of the world so great that it can never be supposed thoughts can touch across it. Or else too forthcoming. And if hands touch—" he stopped with a smile and added: "Then they should certainly be hands like this loveliest which I permit myself to kiss."

And promptly did it. Mary Beton sighed. Would he go further and if so, how far? Did she desire it? And if so, how much? Possibly by accident or as a part of the Purpose his hand retained hers gently.

"Dear lady of my heart, have I wounded you by disparagement of your Queen or any other in comparison with your sweet self? Forgive a—an admirer whose admiration

is so respectful that it knows no hope. How can it, when all the world knows the Maries are sworn to virginity while their Mistress remains unwedded ? Shall I try to tell you how many men in France and Scotland are sighing for the news of her marriage ? Or do you guess ? "

Again Mary Beton sighed. His manners were courtly but with a something more stable and durable than usual. They inspired a sense of wisdom, of strength, of something a woman could lean on if she needed advice and support.

He continued gently: " Naturally her marriage is of tremendous importance to all the world, and since my whole heart is concerned in it I will trust the lady I worship beyond what an ambassador should dare—that is, if I can hope—*dare* hope that the marriage of the Queen would not be displeasing to her also."

" If it were for her good it would be a joy to all who love her and of those I am one," Mary Beton said primly. The touch of his hand was gentle as a swaying spray of roses but perceptible.

" We understand each other, loveliest. Then I will tell you, on the solemn promise that it goes no further."

She shaped a faint promise with her lips.

" In England, as you know, there is no question more important to all, from our Queen downward. And Her Majesty feels that she should have the casting voice in view of Queen Mary's heirship to England. Now—but this is a mighty secret ! "

So mighty that Mary Beton's ears tingled at being made its repository. A State secret—and of Elizabeth's, and on the husband chosen in England for her Queen ? In her deep gratification it cannot be sworn that she herself did not slightly, ever so slightly, press Randolph's hand. Her eyes spoke for her and he responded instantly.

" It is proposed—lean your ear close. Ah, what an ear ! A pearl-shell tinged with rose !—that she should marry an English nobleman. Your wisdom will see the point. In that way our English pride will be gratified, and besides, as you know, our stubborn nation would never accept a foreign prince as King Consort. Now I will test your bright intelligence. I give you a guess—who is the man to be envied above all others excepting only the man to whom Mistress Mary Beton gives her dear heart ? "

It was beautifully said. It could be seen how little his interest was in politics. She felt the subject had been introduced only to give him a foothold of mutual confidence with her. She would show him she was worthy of it.

"I have guessed already!" she said, smiling sweetly into his eyes. "I had guessed before you spoke. Who but Lord Darnley? When he came so secretly to visit the Queen less than three weeks after the King of France's death *my* mind was made up, though of course I kept it to myself."

Randolph thrilled to his finger-tips! So this was that, and a march stolen on Elizabeth and Throckmorton, as you might say under Throckmorton's nose! And not a hint had leaked out. The fool, the stiff starched idiot! This would be a pretty spoke in his wheel when it came to Elizabeth's ears, as it would do by the swiftest courier he could lay hands on. And Darnley's parents, the Earl and Countess of Lennox, were in England under Elizabeth's pouncing paw. And the long lad himself was there—a fool whose wits were as short as his legs were long! She would make the three pay dear for that ride of his in France. Randolph could have shouted aloud for triumph. Instead he pressed Mary Beton's hand more closely with eyes that besought more and more intimate confidences. Satisfied that she had impressed him she went on to prove her intellect still further by proudly enumerating the suitors for the Queen's hand.

"And King Eric of Sweden has written privately to say he is her true knight——"

Eric of Sweden! Elizabeth's own suitor? Speechless at the wealth of the gold mine he had struck Randolph could only smile unutterable understanding and knowledge, while she went on with her list of information.

"So you see, my Queen need not waste her time on English nobles unless she wills—not she! She is fair and wise and good. Do you know, Mr. Randolph, that she has chosen two almoners to look into the cases of all distressful persons who ask her charity, and do you know that she has set apart a yearly sum of her money to educate orphans, and do you know that she has appointed an advocate for the poor whom she pays to defend their causes in cases of injustice, and that she has appointed the judges to sit three

days a week that there be no delays nor lame justice in Scotland, and that she herself will sit in the court to-morrow with her angel's face to hear the cases tried and see justice done? No, there is none like her, and the more you know her the more you will love our Queen of Queens!"

Randolph knew these things but they did not especially interest him. He thought them the whim of a pretty lady determined to be noticed for her charity. Still, he would mention them to Cecil. Supposing anything were to happen to Elizabeth they would be a popular sort of advertisement for her successor, and it would tell well for himself that he had reported them. What really moved him to the soul was the information as to Darnley. The Lennoxes had kept so quiet that none would have guessed their cunning, and the discovery would give him much credit with Elizabeth.

And Eric of Sweden! Good God! The national mischief a sweet-faced woman may work! That would drive Elizabeth mad. And Chastelard? Could there be anything in that? Was there any reserve in Mary Beton's confidences? He was vexed to the core when the other couples passing recalled him to the need of offering his hand and leading her stately as a swan to her place in the next measure.

Alas, there was very much in that affair of Chastelard's! At least one may own there is much when love, madness and death are in the air, a triad by no means inseparable in Love's history. The French left Scotland, and doubtless the knowledge of that inevitable and eternal parting precipitated the tragedy which Brantôme had foreseen in grim silence. For he returned, slipping back uninvited over those grey seas, and it would have been better that his ship had foundered and he had never seen her face again. Mary's instinct had told her of his hopeless love and its hopelessness warmed a pity in her heart which could never be contemptuous and least of all in the case of Chastelard. To her he held the rank of a great poet and in her heart, as in the estimation of France, a poet was the equal of a king and more. Had not Margaret the Scots-born Dauphiness of France stooped and before her ladies and courtiers kissed the sleeping Alain Chartier on the lips whence such sweetness of music had issued? These things were not understood in half-barbarous Scotland—as in the French

culture—and she herself would not have scrupled, short of a kiss, to give some great and public mark of her favour to the French Apollo. Failing that she welcomed him to her presence, sighed over the male beauty of his voice and the passion of his words, mourned sweetly to him of her grief at his going, her joy at his return, and did her foolish best with foolish kindness and innocence unworthy of her nearly nineteen years to fan a flame that needed icy streams of cruelty for her safety and his own.

Eagle eyes were upon her. Whether she sat at Council with her ministers or danced in the great gallery at Holyrood, every motion and glance were watched and reported. John Knox now only lived to defame her.

"In the presence of her Council," he wrote bitterly, "she keeps herself very grave, for under her mourning weeds she can play the hypocrite in full perfection. But now that her French fiddlers and others of that band have got the house, there may be seen skipping not very comely for honest women." Chastelard the godless, with his heathen gods and goddesses, was Knox's special aversion. A slip there would have gladdened his stern heart before the joys of Heaven.

Moray, with the same thought, bided his time with bitterly keen observation. There might be other things beside "skipping" not very comely for honest women. If so it would certainly be to his advantage to know them. He was of the opinion that Mary might be mad enough to appoint Chastelard her secretary and keep him in Scotland, and it was annoying to see that she not only did not do so but began to take equal interest in the noble voice of a little deformed intelligent Italian, David Riccio, who had come to Scotland with the Ambassador of the Duke of Savoy and ingratiated himself with her by taking the tenor solos at the Chapel Royal. There she would sit, lost in exactly the same dream of bliss as when Chastelard sang of love, to hear the little Italian deformity chant the Ave Maria, her cheek leaned on a fair hand, raising eyes of heavenly transport to his ugly face, and hearing through him the choirs of angels. It angered Moray to whom art was nothing. It drove Chastelard mad, and she heeded neither. It bewildered Randolph, equally insensible to all beauty but that of women, who wrote distractedly to Mr. Secretary Cecil that even through "private intelligence"

he could not come at the truth about Chastelard though he would certainly unravel it before long. "But he is well entertained by the Queen and has great conferences with her."

Randolph was busy at the moment making lists and summaries of the histories of the Scots lords and other personalities who he thought would be of interest and importance to English policy in Scotland, since it was a fear of Elizabeth's and Cecil's that Mary might choose some powerful nobleman of her own country for consort. And as the months went by and his lists grew more complete there were few of whom the English court did not possess useful little biographies for reference. Among them the Earl of Bothwell figured as one very unlikely to attract her favour otherwise than as a rough but trustworthy guardian of the Border—that Debatable Land between England and Scotland—as men called it—a one-eyed ugly fool, a rough, uncourtly boor, boastful, rash and venturesome. Randolph attached infinitely more importance to Chastelard's love-sick gallantries, and his biography of Bothwell was curt and dull. There is emphatically such a thing in diplomacy as being too clever. Bothwell was to count heavily later on, and Chastelard—nothing.

Perhaps the one person who saw accurately enough into Randolph's own intentions so as to distrust every word he uttered was Mary Seton, who viewed his philanderings with Mary Beton with disgust. She could not keep it in her own pocket.

"If you think that man loves you you never were more mistook," she said with her own bluntness to the amorous Beton some weeks after the famous Purpose. She caught her fellow-Mary idling over a copy of verses composed by some rhymester of the English Court, bedecked with flames and darts and all the armoury of love, and the sight of it was tinder to fire. Pulling a stool before her senior she sat squarely down and faced her.

"For I tell you, Mary Beton, and best you should know it in time, that every word that sharpster can scavenge is reported in his next mail to England, and you should guard your tongue with bit and bridle—God knows it is too long already!—lest he should hurt the Queen with your gossip."

Mary Beton, red and pale alternately at the memory of many confidences, defended herself feebly.

"The Queen has no greater admirer. He has as good as said fifty times that she would be admired and loved in England for the wonder she is, if only she were not Catholic and——"

"And you listened to him? You believed him? And did you let drop any crumbs concerning Chastelard and his mad folly? Did Randolph tell you he watches him as a cat does a mouse? *What* have you told him?"

"Nothing!" said Mary Beton, and broke down into sobs, from which nothing could be deciphered but that she wished them all back in France.

"Yes, if Lethington could go too—Randolph's friend and yours and the red-headed witch's Scots spy! I tell you, Mary Beton, you are touching pitch and you will need to wear gloves for ever after unless you are wary. You can do more than your own weight of mischief in ten minutes, though you are no feather!"

And that night came the first of the Queen's catastrophes in Scotland—a night of bitter blackness in her memory then and for ever. The evening had been spent in music and happy talk in her little library where the books which showed her tastes—rare indeed for a Sovereign of the time—were stored. Lovely illuminated books of the old histories and romances of France, rare poems of Charles d'Orléans and many more, bound in velvet and clasped with gold and gems, lives of famous men also from which kings should learn wisdom. And there, happy with her Maries and her illegitimate sister, the Countess of Argyll, with her half-brother the gay young Lord Robert Stuart, and Chastelard to sing and discourse of the Courts of Love and ancient France to them, the evening had been passed to her heart's delight.

It was late when the Maries unbound her long hair and made her ready for the stately bed rayed in gold with the arms of Scotland, and left her to the untroubled sleep of youth. Darkness and quiet fell on the palace, only a silver lamp fed with scented oil burnt dimly in the great shadowy room, and the door between her bedroom and that where Mary Seton slept on duty was closed for greater silence.

Suddenly she awakened from a painful dream of crowds,

of voices, crying, beseeching, hands raised to entreat, and started up to find Chastelard kneeling by the bed, grasping her hands with palms that burnt like fire—Chastelard gone clean mad—entreating her in the name of God to have mercy on his tortured love and release his soul from the pains of hell. Tears that stung her fell on her cold hands, words that terrified her were muttered with his mouth against her ear—she, the Queen of Scotland insulted and humiliated in her own palace! Never before had a soul utterly released from self-control been bared before her. Never had she seen a man brought to the level of a beast with the primeval instinct stripped naked. She dragged her hands from him and shrieked wildly for help, conscious only of one thing—that a pit of very hell had opened in loathsomeness in her path of flowers and her feet were on the brink.

Shriek after shriek, the man still protesting, choking, struggling, Mary Seton burst the door open and rushed to her, Mary Livingstone following, shrieking as wildly as the Queen for help.

It came, and from a source more to be feared if possible than the outrage itself—Moray with a chamber-robe of black velvet thrown about him, pale and stern, his hand on his sword.

Mary flew to him, choking, hysterical.

"Brother, your sword. Kill him. Let him not live to breathe his shame. The coward—the villain!"

Moray put a strong hand over her sobbing mouth.

"Govern yourself. If I killed him what would men believe but that he must be silenced? Women, be quiet! One of you run to Hamilton and the guard."

Mary Livingstone would have fled on the errand, but Mary Seton caught her by the arm and confronted Moray.

"My Lord, this must not be public. Cut him down, and we will help you drag his carcass away to where it will seem he fell in a common brawl. The Queen's name must not be spoken!"

She had seen through him as if his soul were glass. The Queen was to be smirched—it would play his game for power. He knew her thought. The glare in his eyes swept hers as he tore Mary Livingstone's arm from her grasp.

"Woman—the guard! In the Queen's name!"

Mary had sunk half-dazed upon the chair. Courage for fighting she had and for endurance, but this first blow at royal honour struck her like doom. She saw her fair fame stripped naked for every man to wanton with, and was dead to all else.

It seemed none remembered Chastelard. He stood ghost-pale grasping the velvet curtain, his eyes on the Queen. Had he seen, had he heard Moray? There is a world beyond daily consciousness which he had entered for the moment. Mary Seton flew to him and shook him awake by the shoulder.

"Your dagger, your dagger! In the Queen's name end your miserable life before the men are here. Now! Or I'll do it for you."

He stood stiffly, staring at Mary—at Mary only, and as Mary Seton tore at his sheathed dagger it was too late. The rush of armed feet was at the door—men's wild amazed faces in the tossing of torchlights. Moray's voice rang out.

"This man was found in the Queen's bed-chamber. Arrest him in the Queen's name."

Half-fainting in a chair, her face hidden as if in shame, what could they think at such words? That desperate extremity rallied her to her feet, and to the most mistaken words she could have uttered.

"Arrest the villain, and bear witness, brother, that I called for help. Take him from my sight."

They closed about him, still staring like a man drunk with one madness only, the madness of possessing every look, every movement of hers until the last.

They were gone, and she sat looking at her women like a woman stunned. Mary Seton threw herself at her feet.

"Madam, I have done wrong—madly wrong, but it seemed best. Listen. Last night I found Chastelard in your chamber like a man dazed. He stood within the door staring and silent. I thought him drunk and pushed him out and bid him begone. For I thought—O Madam!—that if I called the men your name would be lightly spoken. And he went, still silent, staggering a little still, like a man drunk, and I said: 'To-morrow he himself will have forgotten and none will know it.' And now—O Mary Stuart, kill me for I have sinned! But would—would with all my soul that my Lord Moray would have heard me."

She looked up tearless in her Mistress's face while Mary Livingstone stood by sobbing with fright. Mary, recovering slowly, laid her hand upon her head.

"You did right as far as you could see. I know your way had been the better but it was not to be. My brother is true and he judged otherwise. I must bear it as I can for the world will ring with it."

In a few moments Moray returned, a touch of affection in his manner that made her fly to his arms as if for refuge, quick and impulsive to return the faintest show of love.

"It was a sore fright for you, Madam—sister—and the man is surely mad as will be proved at his trial. Get to bed now and sleep in safety."

"A public trial?" She wrested herself half away from his arms, looking up pitifully in his face. "O brother, the shame!"

"What other way than to let the law judge him? You do not desire private murder, and Hamilton and the guard to guess as guess they would? No—no. It is too late. He must die by the law's hand."

It was too late indeed. Mary Seton, behind him, her young face grim with hatred, knew there was no way now but his. He had won the first throw in the bitter game that was to be played out between him and his sister the Queen. He could not defy her, but in secret he could work at her ruin as a man pierces the dam that defends a kingdom from the ocean.

A few days later Chastelard was brought to public trial and condemned to speedy death on the scaffold. There were those who pitied him for his bright valour and the poetry and romance he shed upon the world, and even for the mad love that had been his death. Such pleaded with the Queen for mercy that she could not have given if she would, unless to her own ruin and civil war in Scotland.

Ten days after that cruel night he stood upon the scaffold with a surging crowd about him frantic to get a sight of the Queen's lover, and the headsman's axe dazzling in his eyes. To him at the moment it seemed but a wild passage in one of his own romances. So knights loved and fate brought them into great perils and stormy seas, and they awoke before the end, and lo it was a dream! And love's own lady stood with garlanded head to welcome them—a kiss

sweeter than life's joys hovering on her lips ! So it would be with him also. He refused a priest—what sexless priest could know the strange passion that upheld him ? He walked proudly to the scaffold—bright-eyed in danger as his uncle the great Bayard—that knight without fear or reproach. They called upon him to pray in the last moment. Smiling, he waved his hand and repeated a verse of Ronsard's great and noble lyric to Death the Deliverer.

Then turning towards her palace he cried aloud with a great voice and terrible eyes set upon her windows : " Farewell to the loveliest and cruellest of princesses," and so submitted to the sharp kiss of the axe.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

FOR him the bitterness was past, but not for Mary. None but those who best knew her were likely to believe a man would dare so much without encouragement. Elizabeth read Randolph's account of the affair with greedy eye and a smile of glee. It sickened her that this young loveliness should be her rightful heir, though had she been a dull, submissive, ugly wench with the tie of blood between them, she would have probably chosen her from the world. Even now if she could be the acknowledged head and Sovereign she would be prepared to choose a husband for this foolish young Queen, to guide her policy, and finally to leave her the throne. For in her own secret heart Elizabeth knew herself incapable of children, and though she coquetted with the notion of marriage, used it as a weapon of policy, delighted in the incense it brought her as a woman, her mind set more firmly every day against risking its fruitless bondage. She had seen the daily infidelities of her brother-in-law Philip of Spain to her wretched sister Mary. She had watched with sharp eyes the scandals of her father Henry the Eighth's Court, and could measure most accurately what a childless woman must fear from her husband. Supposing she chose some foreign prince, would her life be safe one day from his ambitions? Or an English nobleman? His party in the State might outweigh her own and she sink into slavery. Certainly she could not exist without men and their atmosphere of homage and sex, but she had taught herself that all she needed of them could be had without marriage and still hold them her expectant beggars.

But Mary—Mary was her obsession. Elizabeth gloried in the power and splendour of the English crown and desired no mean successor to her own virginity. Provided she could in everything bow Mary to her will she preferred a woman

of the blood-royal of England, royal by birth, royal by marriage with the King of France, to glorify the throne of England. For religion she cared nothing. With herself it had been a matter of policy, and if Mary had sense she would think England worth the sacrifice of a Mass. That must come and she must be taught her place. She must come suing to Elizabeth for her grace, and no longer flaunt her youth and purity and beauty in the face of her elder and better. This affair with Chastelard was a happy earnest of the future. Everywhere in England the story was spread with the accompanying assertion and suggestion. Do men risk their lives in a Queen's bedroom without invitation? Unbelievable indeed!

Mary in Scotland heard and paled. She knew Elizabeth's hatred, though with her sunny optimism she was always certain she could win her in the long run and be her very good "cousin and sister," in reality. But this was a cruel stab. And John Knox, always on the alert against her, was swift to the attack. He desired an interview with Moray and questioned him sharply—a thing Moray's pride indulged only for his own purpose's sake.

"And you found him there, my Lord, hearing the Queen's voice?"

"I heard cries," Moray answered evasively. "But whether hers or the women's I cannot tell."

"Then it may be possible it was the *women* screamed on finding a man in the Queen's chamber?"

Knox's eyes were glinting like coals of fire. His words tripped over each other in his eagerness.

"I cannot say. Her Grace's story is that she screamed on waking and perceiving the fool by her bedside."

"That would certainly be her story, my Lord."

Even Moray was compelled to resist an impulse to strike Knox with the flat of his sword if no more. He was no democrat. But words which gave him a temporary hurt might be worth their weight in diamonds to him later on.

Therefore he was silent and Knox continued with triumph: "And so Chastelard got the reward of his dancing, for he must give his head lest he should betray Her Grace's secrets."

Moray lifted his head with a darting glance but gave his

inveterately smooth speech : " Surely you go too far, Master Knox, and have no right to speak this unproven of the Queen who is your natural Sovereign."

John Knox uttered a snort of contempt.

" She is my Sovereign now, but we have God's warrant for despising Ahab and Jezebel and the like cattle. Said I not what would come of her ungodly flinging and dancing? "

Moray shook his head and turned on his heel. Much water must run under the bridge before he could discuss Mary as openly as he desired. It was coming, for gossip was for the first time busy with an untarnished name. Those who knew and loved her rallied to the defence. Her faithful Melville told Knox to his face that he had disgraced himself in trying to smirch her fair fame.

" For you know well, Master Knox, that the Queen's Majesty, in France and after returning from France, has behaved herself so princely, honourably and wisely that her reputation is spread in every country, and she is determined it shall so continue. She will maintain that conduct to her life's end, for I observe in her that she will have none but decent people in her company so far as possible, for she abhors all vice and vicious persons. This you know as well as I."

" Your assertions, sir, may be left to time ! " was all Knox vouchsafed as he swung away. He knew his strength in Scotland and cared not a jot for any lord or knight of them all. And not one of them but respected or feared his strength because he was known to be honest in his fanaticism and sour persistence. Mary was a Catholic and therefore a Jezebel to be destroyed without mercy, but he would not help to destroy her for any personal ambition, for though no saint he despised wealth and rule as much as any saint of any faith. He would destroy her to the greater glory of God and for no lesser reason, and because truth of purpose wins men they followed him as they would a prophet of the Lord of Hosts. None the less his bigotry and Moray's subtlety could work well hand in hand.

But in this matter of Chastelard as in all else Time was good to her elastic sweetness of temper, too innately healthy to grieve over-long, too sanguine to believe in any cloud but as a veil of stars and sunshine. And he was dead. She could forget. At night in dreams she sometimes

beheld that terrible look of thwarted passion, but the world was gay, and there were royal duties and merry-makings where she shone—lightening and warming all about her with sunny beams. Indeed she was still an unripe girl, a sharp green bud with what was packed inside the sheath unknown to herself as to others.

She must open Parliament, mourning robes laid aside, glittering as she had done in France in robes of State and crown and sceptre, Queen of Scotland as of hearts. Her Maries and all the great ladies of Scotland clustered about her, and those admitted to the old Parliament House beheld a sight never to be forgotten—that splendour and perfume of womanliness enthroned where the fighting kings of Scotland had sat before her. But there was one fear. Was the Scots Queen so foreign that she must address her subjects in French? For if so, and though Scotland had had many a French princess on the throne, it would be a blow to their hopes. They little knew her—quick as lightning to catch and reflect every trait of grace and tact—eager to feel with every man. When she rose, her stately robes of velvet and miniver falling long and straight about her, her bright face shining with joy in her own delight, she spoke their own tongue, with even the touch of Scots r's and vowels that made it most dear and intelligible to Scotland. It mattered little what she said as long as it was the incomparable she who said it. Ending, all sprang to their feet, not a man or woman there but was for the moment her slave.

They shouted until the roof rang: "God save that sweet face! Was there ever orator spoke so properly and sweetly!"

What could she do but assure herself and plume her feathers in that great personal triumph? It was the breath of her nostrils, the food that nourished her for nobler deeds and better deservings in the future. She rose on it like a towering eagle—but yet was a dove at heart, if Fate had so willed it.

Yet the deed of Chastelard did not die with its memory. It incited Moray to more subtle and more insidious intrigues in the question of her marriage, and still more, to his steady purpose of alienation of the true hearts among her nobles who would have died to save her a scratch. He reported

her mockery of them, her false purposes, to each. And every word a lie!

In her name he ruined his own enemies, the Hamiltons; he broke the Gordons. He did his bitter best to inflame the great Highland clans against her with injustices they would not have borne from God, and was succeeding all too well in his snake's work.

One day Mary Seton came flaming to her, her eyes raining scorn: "You are no Queen, Mary Stuart, you that sit here over your music and let your false brother make your name stink all over the glens and mountains! Kill me if you will for a truth-sayer of God's truth. The Gordons—the Hamiltons——" She choked on it. But she had her will if it was to stir the Queen.

Mary leaped to her feet and faced her: "You know me little, Mary Seton, when you make a craven of me. I wept for the Gordons, I weep still at night when none sees, for a Queen must play her part if she loses her heart's dearest. I trust my brother and with good right for the tie of blood's sake, and also he knows the country as I cannot, who have lived in France until the woeful day I came here. What would you have me do? Destroy him and his? And then what? And the false English for ever sowing discord in Scotland, do what he will!"

Mary Seton was relentless. She scowled in her Mistress's face.

"You never said a truer word, Mary Stuart! The false English do what he wills with a vengeance, for he is their paid lackey. He is to rule under the red-haired slut. My father knows it that captured the English courier on the Border when they rode home from Bothwell's tower. I swear as I live, it is true! Note how your sword falls always on Moray's enemies. And why?"

"Because they are also mine!" cried Mary as furious as the other. "Because our cause is one!"

"Is it indeed!" says the Seton facing her like a warrior. "What? The elder, the man, a bastard and sworn to serve his legitimate sister that sits on the throne and bids him go and come like a slave? What of his proud jade of a mother—the Lady of Lochleven Castle—that would call herself your father's wife if folk did not know her for his wanton? You chatter of history like a parrot! Read there

how bastards love their lawful brothers and sisters, that kick them from place and power into the gutter!"

"Gutter? I have made him an earl. He is rolling in fat abbeylands and money chests. The richest man in Scotland by my grace!"

The two were facing each other almost breathless in the dispute.

"By your grace! And you think he thanks you! No—but by his own cunning that lies hard on the rudder of your mind and twists it where he will. Does he not know that if the Catholics win he must disgorge their plunder? I see your danger and you are blind—but I love you—I love you!"

The flag of daring was dropping in a calm of tenderness succeeding the storm. Those two loved each other well, and Mary, always "patient to endure" in Randolph's words, would take from Mary Seton what she would from no other living. She could not convince her as to Moray, but she could hold the Queen's love—say what she would. There was never heart more true to its friends. Now the storm dropped, she opened her arms to the girl, and Mary Seton kissed her cheek like a sister, accusing herself of cruelty in the manner but not the matter of her accusation. She saw Moray's game too well to retract a word.

"But if you will not distrust your traitor, for that he is, and in Elizabeth's pay also—do another thing, my heart's dearest, I beseech you. Take a husband that shall see through him and hold him in check. You who have so many lovers—choose the best, and God be with you."

It was not only good—it was vitally necessary counsel. Mary recognized that in her soul. Things could go on no longer as they were. A choice must be made, and an heir provided for Scotland and England if there was to be any hope of peace internal or external. Elizabeth was pressing for it daily, thrusting forward impossible candidates—whether to delay fruition of that marriage, or to gain power in Scotland, or to hinder the hopes of the European princes who each hoped to catch the golden apple for his own before it fell into the hand of another. And if her choice were neglected she would avenge it sooner or later.

Mary sat down sighing, relaxed from wrath into the depression and care that subject always brought her.

"I know I must marry. But whom? King Philip of Spain has offered his heir, Don Carlos, and I may be Queen of Spain as well as of all the rest, but I had rather have free England for my own than a hundred Spains, and the English hate the Spaniards; they had more than enough of them in Queen Mary's time. It would ruin my English hopes. Many want me, but some reason against them one and all! I had best take a leaf from Elizabeth's book and die as I am. Whatever I do Knox and Moray will rend my heart between them. But there is one——"

She was silent a moment, then continued.

"If you knew a man, Mary Seton, good to look upon, wholesome of face and body, of royal descent and good fortune, a Catholic yet no bigot, allied to England and Scotland alike, would you say such a man might suit me?"

Mary Seton looked up suspiciously.

"I would say, 'Yes' if you added what you have left out—a true heart, courage like the steel of his sword, love and fidelity to buckler his promise. If you can say all this, then I say, 'Yes' indeed."

"How can I say what I have not tested? But surely a woman may hope when a man is what I have said?"

"Hope is a flatterer," Mary Seton said shrewdly. "Proof is an honest man. But who does Your Grace mean?"

Mary hesitated. "Do you remember the long lad, Mary Seton?"

A pause—Mary Seton swiftly revolving the situation. That would not suit Elizabeth. Darnley was too near the English throne. Not long since she had clapped his mother in the Tower, it was thought upon some news received from Randolph. Not only so, but Elizabeth had sent unusually gracious letters of late to say she had a nobleman high in her own favour to propose as King Consort of Scotland. That would of course mean English predominance in Scotland, and possibly an end to Mary's life as soon as the way was paved for Elizabeth's sovereignty, but for all that it must be listened to, and unless she herself proposed the long lad the end must be disaster.

"Ah, you talk bold like the rest!" said Mary sadly, "but when it comes to choice you falter like the rest and cannot say. I am weary of it all! A cloister would be the best for me as I said long since, and—what is this?"

A messenger from Mr. Randolph requesting a private audience for news from Her Majesty of England. They flew to attention at once—Mary Seton adding a few touches to the beauty which needed no burnishing, and then withdrawing behind the chair where she would remain unless Randolph objected.

He did not. It was too well known that Mary Seton was in the Royal confidence. He required only a promise of secrecy, and then proceeded to business with a quick furtive look at the Queen's face that he might make a report to England of any signs of failing. It was known she had suffered from sleeplessness and nervous pains in the head since the murder of the Gordons, and never a flutter of an eyelash but was some political portent.

"Pale, but scarcely more than ordinary, and fair as ever," was the private verdict he registered on his despatch as she spoke.

"I long, Mr. Randolph, to hear what news you bring me of my good sister. It must bring good to me, coming from her. Look how I wear her jewel on my finger. That, and the ring of my late lord the King of France are the only two that shall never part from me in life or death."

She displayed a diamond cut into the shape of a perfect heart set in smaller brilliants, a gift from Elizabeth, it being in the order of the day to use cajolery as well as abuse. This ring was hereafter to have a strange and terrible history. It shone innocuous now in its morning glitter of dew-beams.

"I have news indeed, Madam, blithesome and good news of a gallant and noble husband chosen for you by my sovereign Lady, such as she would choose herself were she minded to marry. A man of wealth and high estate and set forth by nature with every good grace!"

"A paragon indeed!" Mary said, a little dryly.

Her mind flew to the Duke of Norfolk whose Duchess was lately dead. Mary Seton's eyes widened with curiosity. Suppose it were the long lad! That might be the best way out of all the difficulties. And yet—impossible! His parents, the Lennoxes, stood too near the English throne to be anything but hated by Elizabeth. A strengthening of their claims she never would endure, and above all by marriage with a Princess: "esteemed and adored by all not

merely on account of her rank but because she was endowed with greater charms and perfections than any other Princess of her times," as the French Ambassador had unluckily written in a paper which her spies deciphered for her.

But Randolph drew an important-looking paper from the portfolio he had brought under his arm and opened it under the doubtful eyes watching him.

"Madam, I am to inform Your Grace that in the sisterly desire of her heart to do you good she will send you for a husband the chief jewel of her realm—my Lord Robert Dudley."

He made an impressive pause, and Mary's first impulse was a shock of astonishment; her next, one of frank laughter—the object was too obvious. What? Every ridiculous story of Elizabeth and Dudley which had delighted the Court of France rose up before her until she put up her fan to hide her lips, and thanked Heaven that Mary Seton being behind her they could not catch one another's eyes. Only long diplomatic training enabled Randolph to keep his own countenance in face of the smothered smile the fan could hardly conceal. But it dropped in a moment, and she was grave as heart could wish. If it were not an open insult it was a game of bluff to keep her amused while great suitors dangerous to Elizabeth trailed off in despair.

She was so long silent that he ventured at last: "Your answer, if it please you, Madam?" hoping to catch her in some sudden mood which might reveal her true feeling, but she was a match for him there, and Mary Seton who faced him might have been a marble model for ladies in attendance on Royalty.

"You will not be surprised, sir, if I defer my decision, being wholly taken by surprise."

Her voice was as colourless as her manner. Nothing to be deciphered. He tried again, observing coolly: "And yet, Madam, such an important subject should not stand in the wind too long."

Again she was ready.

"Your Mistress has always advised me to put honour first in my decision. Shall I increase it by marrying her subject?"

"Why, yes, if by him Your Majesty is likely to inherit a kingdom."

They countered now like the clash of rapiers in fencing—she as quick at the *riposte* as he.

"And why may not my sister marry and have children? And then where am I?"

"High in my Mistress's favour, Madam. So far as we see and know, Her Majesty does not desire to marry, and with Lord Robert Dudley for your husband, in whom she has perfect confidence, you will stand as well as he, and what may not then be hoped? Could she make any offer of purer sincerity?"

The button was off her foil and it flashed.

"For my part I take it rather as a proof of her good-will than her sincerity, for it is said she regards him so highly herself that she cannot well spare him."

Randolph put up shocked hands of horror, but at a loss for the moment could only beg her to consult Lethington and Moray—on both of whom he knew he could count. They were so far successful that Moray let him know the same day that she would consent to a conference on the matter. Official, but what lay behind it?

CHAPTER IX

TO that concession Randolph could attach very little importance when Mary Beton reported to him the conversation in the Queen's private chamber with the Maries. She had got into the way now of repeating all the tattle she could pick up, on his assurance that Elizabeth meant her Mistress all good, and English knowledge of her intentions would serve no one so much as the Queen of Scotland herself. Perhaps that assurance would not have served unbacked by the amorous gaze with which Randolph garnished the elaborate compliments—not only to her beauty but to her diplomatic understanding—which he laid like declarations at her feet.

"It is well indeed for the Queen that she has about her a sweet lady who knows so well what road she should take. If she had your wits with your beauty, Mistress Mary, our way would be easier, our future more assured in England and Scotland. How precious is the understanding of a well-born woman! And how did you counsel Her Grace?"

They were strolling in the garden with its long avenue of yew while the Queen shot at the butts—Diana with her bow. Their thoughts were not on the lovely pose as she drew the bowstring to her ear. All fair women should take the bow for their weapon. What thoughts does it not suggest from the crescent moon to the archery of Eros? But Randolph was merely thinking how much more dust he could throw in those fine eyes of Mary Beton's, and she was tattling to his heart's desire.

"Mr. Randolph, I do assure you my Mistress laughed with such relish in telling us of your Queen's offer that for five minutes and more she could not get the words out of her mouth. To my mind serious matters should be seriously taken."

"They should indeed, fairest and wisest. And what then?"

"The others laughed with her—the minx Mary Seton loudest! She declared—I blush to say it—that she nearly exploded when you gave my Lord Robert Dudley's name with the tail of your eye on the Queen."

"She will laugh to better purpose one day," Randolph said dryly. "And then, Mistress Mary?"

"Why, then, sir, we are told by Sir James Melville that when my Lord Robert wished to go to France, the Queen said to the French ambassador that she could not live without seeing him every day, adding: 'So soon as he is seen anywhere they say I am at hand, and wherever I am seen it may be said he is there also.' How then can she spare this lord as husband to another? Is it not true that his chamber is assigned close to her own?"

Randolph bit his lip with vexation. That was the kind of thing in which Elizabeth could never be trusted, the coarsely familiar amorous vein which she got from her father. It sat ill enough on him when he would hoist his ulcerous leg on to his Queen's lap in open court. It sat worse still on a woman and a royal one. He could hear that laughter of Mary's. Merry enough her own court was, she herself setting the example of gaiety. He was always writing of that aspect of it to Cecil. They fleeted the days gaily at Holyrood and on her progresses, but no man could ever boast of more favour from the Queen than a lightly sweeping glance of laughter, or her hand to kiss if he had earned the favour. Why in the name of the devil should Elizabeth, clear and cold of brain as a man except indeed when a lover got in the way of common sense, make herself the laughing-stock of Europe with those kitchen-wench endearments? What could he say, but a little lamely: "I am sure your good sense assured Her Grace that no such story could be true. There is no woman of more majesty in Europe than my Queen, and so I am sure you hear from Sir James Melville."

"Indeed I said it, Mr. Randolph, but she laughed like a gay girl instead of a great Queen, and said Her Grace of England was old enough to know better behaviour with men."

A fearful thrust at a tender spot and Randolph digested

it in silence. Should he tell Cecil, should Cecil lay it before Elizabeth? Good God!—she would take more easily the denial of Calais than such an insinuation!

"Sir James Melville is a good man but no courtier," Randolph observed with as much disparagement as he dared. "Did he write more, Mistress Mary?"

"Why, yes," pursued the charming spy, "he said when your Queen was done with tickling my Lord's neck she asked Melville how he liked my Lord Robert, and he answered he appeared to be a worthy subject and happy in a Princess who could reward his merits. Whereupon, she pointed to my Lord Darnley and said she believed our Queen liked that long lad better of the two."

"She never said that!" cried the startled Randolph.

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Randolph, and Melville answered that no woman of spirit would make choice of Darnley, for in spite of his inches he was more like a woman than a man, lovely and lady-faced and no hair on his chin. At which she laughed, and then she kissed our Queen's picture, and asked whether her hair or our Queen's hair was the best, and which was the handsomest woman."

"It is lies!" said the furious Randolph, "she never asked such foolish questions—" Then hastily corrected himself. "I can trust your judgment to know this report is malicious, Mistress Mary."

"Indeed I thought so!" she said eagerly, "but so says Sir James, and that she would have her answer. So he told her she was the handsomest woman in England and Queen Mary in Scotland, hers was the fairest skin, but the Queen of Scotland very lovely. So then your Queen asked which was the tallest and he said: 'Our Queen,' and yours said: 'Then she is too tall, for I am the perfect height.' So all the ladies laughed till they near cried for laughing. And my Queen laughed the longest."

What was one to do with such a woman—with any woman, Randolph reflected bitterly. He was sure that if he had Dudley's influence he could have slidden in a hint that vanity so openly displayed defeated all its own ends, and that royal caresses are best behind locked doors. Why in God's name Dudley let his Mistress play the fool in the face of Europe he could not think. It was his department to manage her and keep her in good temper. They were all

compelled to leave that to him and he cheated them daily. Really put out of countenance he tried to change the subject by asking if Mary Beton thought the Queen were seriously attracted to the long lad.

"I will tell you later, for now she does nothing but laugh at her lovers one and all, and my Lord Robert Dudley most. She has just had an offer of marriage from the King of France her late husband's brother! And, if she will not have him, from his younger brother the Duke of Anjou. And in this letter the King said that he pitied his brother, her husband's early death, yet envied him because he had enjoyed the love of an angel like herself, and could only esteem himself happy if he could gain it now. So she may be a double Queen of France if she will. The truth is, she is the Queen of hearts, and whatever is there she can have."

"And will she?" asked Randolph thunderstruck. The vein of Mary Beton's information grew richer daily. It appeared the Scots Queen's beauty might yet rule the world if measures were not taken.

"The letter is but just come. I shall know later," she answered serenely. She was beginning to be aware of her own consequence as one who knew the mind of her Queen—and Randolph, realizing this, felt the need of a step more important than compliments however elegantly offered. He drew a small packet from his pocket, wrapped in a delicately blue silk, and balanced it in his hand with smiling eyes.

"This came from England in our courier's bag, adored Mistress Mary," he said slowly, "and if I hesitate to offer it to the lady whom of all the world I hold highest, it is because I dare not hope that any gift in the world is worth her possessing, and when a man has given his all can he give more?"

Ambiguous—but exquisitely put, with the appearance of love so transparently sincere that no woman's heart need resist her own reflection in that clear mirror. She blushed beautifully as he unpicked the silken knots that fastened the little packet.

"No sharp instrument shall ever cut any bond between you and me," he said tenderly, unfolding the silk and displaying a small silver box. On touching the spring it flew

up and disclosed a brooch of beautiful workmanship, perfect diamond sparks surrounding a heart-shaped ruby.

"Love's fire glowing red," as he pointed out, adding that he had had it chosen for her in London by one who knew his mind. That was perfectly true, seeing that the brooch came from Elizabeth's private store of jewels, and her own royal hand had chosen it for the "worthy Beton" who was making herself more valuable daily, but was not yet to know how the Queen of England prized her. It had been a New Year's court gift and had cost the thrifty Queen nothing.

It was graciously accepted indeed, though in her heart Mary Beton was a little surprised that the offer of marriage now for ever hovering on his lips did not accompany it. Still, what was so certain could wait, and meanwhile it was for her to prove her immeasurable value.

After due thanks she said slowly: "I have wondered, Mr. Randolph, now you have convinced me of your Queen's true affection to ours, whether knowledge of the cipher she employs with her ambassadors would be a good means for making them better known to each other? It might or might not. A woman like myself is no judge of weighty matters but if it would help—I know your true heart."

Why Randolph did not die of joy at her feet he could not tell at the moment, unless it were for the importance of keeping himself alive to receive the sure and great reward this would bring from Elizabeth. They had never yet deciphered one of the letters in this especial hidden writing, though their best wits had been exercised on it. It depended on numbers with a shifting system of keys which they could not trace.

He concealed his joy and said brightly and innocently: "That indeed might help in a cause so good. A thousand thanks, incomparable lady. Who but you could lead the way in the great enterprise of uniting the two kingdoms!"

"Then you shall have it. And now we must return to the group, for the gossips remark that we are much in company."

"They shall have more to remark soon," said Randolph as he kissed the hand she held out, and led her with stately grace along the paved path.

She had not exaggerated Mary's laughter, though more

lay behind it than she guessed. Melville had just got her out of a serious difficulty by using Elizabeth's irritable vanity against herself. Mary had written a letter to Elizabeth in flowing French, which Elizabeth had taken so ill that walking in the garden at Greenwich she all but flung it in Sir James Melville's face.

"See what you have brought me!" she almost shouted. "See what the Queen of Scots has written to me! I swear by God's death that I will never write to her again unless it be a letter to the full as insulting! I have one written and ready that I have only delayed because it is too gentle, but I will write another more vehement that shall touch her up smartly."

She could not divest herself of the tone of dealing with a naughty child which always affected her temper where Mary was concerned, and Melville, swallowing his wrath, asked meekly to see the letter from his Queen.

"And then," said Mary to Mary Seton, scarcely able to speak for laughter, "the beloved Melville read it through and could see no offence in it, as none there was, and believe me, Mary Seton, he had the courage to tell her she was a foolish woman, but so astutely that she fell in her own trap and could make no answer. 'For look you here, Madam,' (said he), 'it is true Your Majesty speaks as good French as any lady who never set her foot in France, but our Queen is a Frenchwoman by training and tongue, and here are some little turns and quirks to a word that none can rightly understand who are not finely skilled in the French language, so that I do not blame Your Grace for misreading what my Queen has written. And doubtless if you write and complain to my Queen she will set you right very sweetly seeing you have not understood.' He said," went on Mary, "that he could scarcely forbear laughing, she was so angry with herself then for having been mistook, for she is more proud of her languages than of anything but her beauty, and she saw she had made an ignorance. So, saying it would be foolish in her to keep up wrath where I had written so courteously, she tore up the letter she had written and I was rid of a scolding."

"Astonishing," answered Mary Seton, "how a great woman can be a foolish one also; for great she is, they tell us."

"She is a great enemy and will do me a mischief when she can. She sits patient as a grey cat by a mouse-hole, and when I put my head out too far, pat will come the cruel claws and one mouse the less to frisk it in the world! Well —so be it!"

Her face saddened as Mary Seton caught her hand and kissed it.

"So it shall *not* be. You shall have a brave husband to guard you and no minion of the witch of England. Dudley indeed! Her lover! His head on your bosom and his heart—no, his purse—in her keeping. But, Madam, I have a thing to say for your ear only. I do not like Mary Beton's conferences with Randolph. She is as great a fool as she is handsome, which is saying much, and suppose she should let drop your little confidences—ah, Mary Stuart, I love your trust, but do you trust us too far?"

That bond of childhood and girlhood between the five had been so strong, so faithful and beautiful, that to Mary Seton it represented more of the world's worth than anything else she knew. Even in speaking of Mary Beton as she thought loyalty bound her, no worse suspicion crossed her mind than unguarded folly, a hint let drop in utter carelessness which might fructify dangerously in the rank soil of Randolph's diplomacy.

Mary laughed aloud.

"Mary Beton? You little Judas! She is truest of the true. She loves me and that says all. But think of Dudley and think of his Mistress! At least there are a few things left to laugh at in this contrary world."

So the great warning had made no impression. Indeed after her fashion the Queen was the kinder to Mary Beton because she had been disparaged though only by a feather-touch. Mary Seton could do nothing but wait and watch, half ashamed of her own suspicions. But change was on their happy little band and it saddened her. She doubted Mary Beton, and dear Mary Livingstone was soon to wed John Sempill—a man English by birth. "Lovely Livingstone," as Randolph called her, was not keeping her vow to wait for the Queen's marriage, and the world took this as proof positive that the Queen would not be long in following her Mary's example.

"For," as she said to Randolph with a touch of sadness,

"not to marry cannot be for me, and even to defer it will cause trouble. But I am a fool to open my heart to you for you Englishmen are too subtle for safety."

Her sigh did not move Randolph, who protested his transparent honesty a little too eagerly. She scarcely listened and then said suddenly, in one of her strange outbursts of far-sighted truth and vision, her face transfigured: "Ah, how much better it would be for the two kingdoms and ourselves if we two Queens, near in blood, neighbours, should be friends, and live together like sisters instead of by plotting and strange means separating ourselves to the hurt of both. And why not? Why not?"

She paused a moment as if for words, Randolph listening attentively in hopes of something useful for reporting to Cecil. But her thoughts were away from the world political, her eyes were full of dark dreams.

"I have thought—thought long and often—why should not my sister and I living thus, give our minds, instead of plotting, to see whether we two being women may not do as great things as ever were done by the kings who sat on our thrones before us? Let us seek this honour one against the other, and not fall to wrangling between ourselves! If she would but hear! That is my soul's desire and I strive and cannot get it."

Greek and Hebrew to Randolph, these sentiments! Follies from a world he had never entered nor would. He thought only that one of her "softer moods" as he called them was upon her, and took swift advantage to ask whether she would one day give her assistance for the English recovery of Calais; and on that—shutting the door of useless dreams behind her—she smiled and said that no cause for quarrel should be found in her. She was about to start upon one of her progresses—a cheerful interval in her harassed life when she could leave Moray and John Knox behind her, and enjoy herself among her friends like a simple lady whose heart is in country pleasures.

They left a few days later. Randolph the watch-dog following afterwards, filled with deep suspicion by the fact that the Earl of Lennox, Darnley's father, had arrived and had had a gracious reception.

Plottings, plottings everywhere! Every word searched to wring out its inmost possible meaning. Deadly animosi-

ties hidden under poisoned smiles, greedy hopes and vengeances under the trustful daily courtesies. Had she understood the tenth part of it, her heart would have died within her, her love of mankind withered like flowers in a fierce sun. Moray, her right hand, was leading her slowly and cautiously to ruin on a path in which every step, every gradation, had been considered and plotted. Knox was aiding him in word and deed—his utterances in public and private reeking with venom and bitterness against the Queen, whose main offence was that she loved her religion as he did his, and spared his the persecution he inflicted upon hers. There were few indeed about her who were not making their interest in her ruin, except the crooked little singer Riccio whom she had chosen for secretary because of his great skill in languages, and a heart whose fidelity she measured by her own and did not find wanting. What wonder if she was glad to get away from Edinburgh and forget all for some careless days in the quiet little northern city of St. Andrews ?

A wealthy citizen's house had been taken for her, and there she lived in peace and merriment with her Maries—for the last time an undivided band—and a few trusty gentlemen. It was an ill sight for her when Randolph's courtly smile intruded itself, for to her he was England, Elizabeth, and her deepest anxieties. Yet she welcomed him sweetly.

"You will soon be weary of this company and treatment, Mr. Randolph, when you see how like a *bourgeoise* wife I live with my little troop. Also, you will spoil our pastime with your grave and great matters."

"The Queen is always the Queen!" he answered in his best manner, but she waved it aside, laughing.

"If you weary of us return to Edinburgh and keep your gravity and great ambassadorship until the Queen goes there. I assure you you shall not get her here, for I know not—I—what is become of her."

He reported her pretty jesting and much merriment to Elizabeth, and could not altogether hide that he liked the atmosphere he did his best to disparage. There was an innocence in her gaiety that it was impossible to hate, but always he believed she was a plotter too at bottom, with the happy knack of using it under a kind of innocent playful-

ness which he considered would have been as attractive as man could wish had it been sincere. On that point he consulted "the worthy Beton," and had for answer that the Queen was hard to understand—so many moods met in her, each sincere at the moment.

"Why, but this morning, galloping about the country, she cried out that she repented of nothing but that she was not a man to know what life it is to lie all night in the fields, or to walk the causeway with a jack and a knapsack, a Glasgow buckler and a broadsword. She is a warrior and a great Queen and a lovely delicate lady, and a scholar and a poet, and many other things all in one, and he would be a bold man who would prophesy what he should find her an hour hence. But each is real."

Randolph could not translate her riddle. He thought her a spider, entangling men in skilful webs for all Mary Beton's assurances, and suspected secret kisses. He could not understand that she was so sweet-natured she would give all the loveliness of her eyes and speech to any man she trusted, like a child innocently offering a poisoned cake and never guessing the death it may bring. There never was less of a coquette nor a more perilous beauty. But he might also have known if he had understood her that something new was in the wind—something of deep concern to her hopes—for there was a quick tremble of eagerness about her more than common, something of anxiety, of doubt, but more of hope. Closely as he studied her he was not quick enough to catch that shade of difference nor to question "the worthy Beton." Nor did she volunteer information, at the moment being, in truth, a little frightened at the step she had taken in handing over the key of the Queen's cipher at the Great Twelfth Night dance and revelry, when she could not for the life of her understand why Randolph had not laid his all at her feet where his heart had so long reposed. Perhaps a faint resentment began to tinge her silence, and as it was his own determination to be hurried in no way, he was not sorry to be obliged to return to Edinburgh. If he could have guessed the great event which was to take place at Wemyss Castle, (to which Mary rode swiftly when he was well out of sight,) no power in heaven or earth would have taken him from her company, and Mary Beton would have been served with compliments as dainty

as the sugared comfits and biscuits following a royal banquet. But he was not to know until too late.

Snow fell from gloomy clouds over Wemyss Castle standing like a sentinel upon the cliff above the sea, the hail-drifts fleeing about it like the blown locks of white old age. Wild winds beat at the fortressed windows, and blew up the stony stairs that climbed in steep spirals to her bower—set like an eagle's eyrie above the rocks and eternal wave-washed torment of the sea. Gales might blow and their thunder beat on the face of the old fortress, but within were light and warmth and a Queen's luxury and welcome, for the walls were draped with arras, and great logs burnt in the huge fire-places, and there were chairs of velvet, and soft carpets upon the mighty stone floors, and wine in crystal cups, and joy and soft eyes and lowered lashes, and a Queen's will to have her way whatever her good sister of England might ordain.

It was the thirteenth of February—an unlucky day some might have said—but lucky enough for a hot wooer, as Darnley came riding through the snow with only a servant or two behind him, and in his breast a gift to be given next day to a royal Valentine if she would take it. And he believed she might. He remembered her fair and gracious at that long-ago meeting in France when he had kissed the hand of the white widow. Would it be given less graciously now? He thought not, for there were many reasons which in his opinion made him the most desirable bridegroom of any that offered even among the Kings of Europe.

Royal English blood—that surely would count with the Heiress of the English crown, royal Scots blood to please the Scots Queen. A handsome face and well-built body, a good voice with the lute, a taste in verses like her own, courtly training, manly tastes in sports and games—all these he had to offer, and what more could even a crowned Queen ask of a husband?

More, much more, if Darnley had known! This girl's great natural gifts trained in the world's hardest school were much, but behind them lay something wiser, higher—too wise for the men who surrounded her, and the Queen who hated her. Wisdom, courage, and a heart set on noble things, quick to feel and see, flawed with a woman's weakness which placed all her hope in the man whose hand should

guide her, whose heart should stay her in the sore difficulties of her life. Wisdom she had, but not the strength to back it. Courage for the flashing deed, but not for the long heart-breaking push which assures victory—the true heart, but not the firm hand. A noble wife for a strong man, but not one to stand alone. And what was Darnley? His face alone could have told if her eyes had not been dazzled by the beauty and youth and joy of him.

Such were the two who were to meet in the ancient castle of Wemyss, perched like a lonely sea-gull among the cries and thunderings of winds and waves on the stormy Firth.

Let us own he dazzled her. A most brilliant young man, fair of face as suited his princedom and great hopes.

As Mary Beton said later to Randolph who lent an eager ear: "He took well with Her Majesty. She said to us he was the handsomest and best proportioned tall man she had ever seen, for he was of a high stature, long and slight, graceful and straight, and, as she knew—well instructed from his youth in all honest and comely exercises. I think, Mr. Randolph, all women have an eye for a man who can match their womanhood with his manhood."

It was an invitation but Randolph was too perturbed even to reply, and she turned away angrily. That dangerous flirtation was wearing a little thin.

"I was a boy when I came to you in France, my sweet Queen-cousin," said Darnley, bowing to kiss the Queen's hand. "I am a man now. You were good to me then. Will you be less good now?"

"By no means, my cousin. I have much respect for your parents," she answered, with a warm thrill running along her smooth cool hands. Here were youth and kindred blood not ill-matched with the royal wine that ran in her own veins. Here was a young frank face, too young surely to conceal a plotting heart behind it. Men had loved her better than life, might not this one love her for a royal life together and all its hopes and deeds? Might he not be a noble father of royal children to sit on a united throne? Could not even Elizabeth be brought to see that here was the true solution of the problem of wedding England and Scotland?

Outside the snow blew white veils about the old towers,

and white desolate lands looked out over black seas, but within the cousins sat by the great fire laughing, talking, whispering, with the Maries at a discreet distance.

Yes—she would risk it. Surely this gallant adoring young man would bring not only gladness with him but a strong sword by his side to awe the turbulent nobles, dearer and nearer than her brother Moray, whom she feared at times when with bent brows he would command her to hear meekly the outrageous scourgings of Knox, or sign her name to cruel extortions and injustices to the nobles.

The inevitable moment came, shod with gold, its face veiled in rainbows.

They stood by a window looking out on the desolate Firth lashing the rocks beneath, snow blowing the eddies above and beneath, nothing else to see but a white tormented world later to lie in the death of a whiter silence. Darnley, so tall that her tall head only topped his shoulder, looked down in amazement at her beauty, for indeed in that moment she touched the full flower of her blossoming. Still in black, still faithful outwardly to the memory of the dead boy, life vibrated in her face in a birth of new delight, her eyes pools of sunshine, the sweetness of her pale face almost unendurable to a man who could understand the hope and confidence disclosed in the illumination that he had power to kindle. Outside was winter but inside summer with all its flowers and ripened fruit. That, Darnley could not understand, but even his vain and fickle nature was awed for a moment. Could it be possible that he had won the world's Rose for whom all the Kings contended ?—the far-away princess of the fairy tales, who with her beauty could give him fulfilment of his wildest ambitions ?

He took her hand in his and brought its warm snow to his lips, with eyes that absorbed the radiance in her.

"If I dared—if I dared to say I loved you, would you turn me from the castle into the snowdrifts ? For if I may not, better the drifts and death in the wild winds than life without you. I was a boy when I saw you, and since then your face has floated between me and any other. I have been your slave from that day."

It was a speech prepared, rehearsed on the gallop from Edinburgh, but the passion in his look and touch were not prepared. The thrill of emotion astonished himself—

shattering for the moment the light loves he had known. If it would last, he might find the world's hidden treasure of bliss.

In her nature there were no complications, simple as a child in love and trust, quick to hope and believe. She laid the kissed hand on his shoulder and gave him all the light of her eyes.

"We will face the world and England together!" she said and no more—could have said no more, for he seized her with a wild release of suspense into joy and kissed her breathless, unresisting—she believing at last that of all sweet things on earth, of all the world's wonders, love is the sweetest, the most miraculous.

CHAPTER X

BUT there was much to consider when she returned to Edinburgh with her secret in her breast, sending Darnley before her that they might not enter together. Setting Elizabeth on one side for awhile, how would the turbulent Scots lords and yet more turbulent John Knox take the news? Those two factions could not be separated and when she sent for David Riccio, whom she trusted utterly for wisdom and secrecy, to confer with her, her first anxiety laid them before him.

They met in the little room at Holyrood which she used for her intimates, and she received him with only Mary Seton who set as high store on the little crooked secretary as she. In both, their intuition, undazzled by any distractions of sex, could look past the pathetic little bowed figure and see the man within pure gold. It was the Queen, her Kingdom and nothing else with him, and Mary Seton he valued only for her loyalty to his idol.

He came in now bowing, in his black velvet doublet edged with fur, his southern blood shuddering in the cold northern February, thin hands clasped nervously in each other to keep in the heat of his poor small body, pathetic in the seeking fidelity of the eyes he fixed on Mary, shadowing outward from the dark bistre semicircles beneath them until they looked unnaturally large above his lank jaws. His bow to Mary Seton was but a forced interruption of that steadfast interpretive gaze, as he slid into the chair she indicated to give an account of his stewardship in the Queen's absence.

Speaking French as always the two worked for an hour without intermission, noting and sorting as they were accustomed, preparing matter for submission to the Council, and that done Mary sat erect in her chair and collected strength for the great purpose of their meeting.

"Signor David, you have known from past words of mine what I had in mind as to my marriage. You know that my good sister of England used every way to hinder me, hoping some accident might cut short my life or end my reign, and how to that end she offered her own favourite Dudley—a thing I might have taken as insult, but could not. But the thing will not wait. Husband and child I must have or perish. Now—I have chosen."

He looked quietly in her face and choosing a new quill laid it before him as if to make notes.

"My Lord Darnley, Madam," he said, not as a question but assertion.

"He. It could not be otherwise. And now I ask your thought first for I know your truth."

He spoke as simply as she. Between those two—indeed those three—was no artifice. What they thought they said and did not spare.

"It could not be otherwise, Madam. But—I would he were not Catholic. You know my religion, but Catholic myself, I say, Your Grace's husband should be of the Reformed religion."

Her beautiful eyes pleaded there.

"Signor David, I must have peace by my fireside. Husband and wife must be of one mind in faith. Their children also."

"There, Madam, again I disagree. Your son must not be a Catholic else he will never sit on the English throne."

She came upright with a flash.

"His soul is more to me than that throne or any! My son shall be baptized in my own faith."

He bowed his head slightly as if no more need be said on that point. The man's wisdom had large faith in time and the inevitable event. Kings and Queens may dispute and deny but things accomplish themselves. This, conveyed in his manner, had a calming effect on her nerves. In the little secretary's presence, she was always assured that troubles disentangled themselves almost without intervention, if men met them with courage and high purpose. Events became bearable which her heart had asserted were unbearable, because it appeared there was some vast Purpose which silently moulded opposition and agreement to its own ends. It was wise to sit unhurried and watch

its workings in blind content. Now, she did not dispute the silence of his bow.

"I desire you to tell me, Signor David, how you think my brother and the nobles will take my marriage. Not what they will say, for that means little, but beneath the surface. Warn me. Instruct me."

He took little more than a moment to think, for in the past few months seeing the inevitable, he had mapped out his thoughts and made a clear chart for her use.

"Madam, qualifying my speech by saying all will depend on my Lord Darnley's actions, I say it will be very ill taken. I have sure evidence now of what Your Grace would not believe, that my Lord Moray is in the pay of England, and all his actions——"

He halted, for she made a low cry full of such pain that Mary Seton started forward, then at a motion of the Queen's resumed her place silently. The ticking of the clock on the table was loud in the silence. Presently, she waved her hand.

He continued: "My Lord Moray will think what that Queen thinks, act as she would have him. His chief associates are the Lords Morton, Ruthven, and others known to Your Grace; all these are paid by the English. Had you chosen a man utterly subservient to her and to them, your reign might have lasted longer—as it may do if Lord Darnley becomes their tool. If otherwise, they will endure so far and no further until you bear a child. It is agreed between the English Queen and the nobles that you shall then abdicate and my Lord Moray will rule as regent."

It was Riccio's belief that one could in any great crisis rely on Mary's greatness of soul, and he spoke tranquilly as though reading a dull State paper for her information. She received it with equal serenity so far as any outward sign went except that her hands tightened on each other.

"I will answer for my Lord Darnley," she said.

"That may change every card in the game, Madam," Riccio said. "For myself I know little of him and hope all. The outer nobles, if I may so call those outside my Lord Moray's inmost party, also have importance. Of these the first is the Earl of Bothwell. Much depends upon him as Lieutenant of the Border and a man with a great following. He should be conciliated by every means in your power."

The Queen shook her head.

"He will never forgive me because I banished him from the Court for scandalous behaviour in Edinburgh soon after I returned from France. I saw him there once and thought him a coarse boor. And I cannot conciliate him, because that man is worse to me than wormwood and I cannot tell why. Danger, foul things, breathe from him as he walks. I shudder in thinking of him as if he walked over my grave."

Riccio did not appear to urge her. He spoke meditatively: "John Knox is his sworn man and a vassal of my Lord Bothwell's family. I could wish there were any way of winning Bothwell. He is a bold man and a bad, and a strong sword in my Lord Moray's hand. He is divorcing his wife and if we could find him a wife on your side——"

"I pity her if we did," Mary said curtly; "I would commit no dog to Bothwell's mercy. Think again, Signor David! He is a man I would be without. His behaviour to his wife is abominable amidst much else abominable."

There came a light scratching at the door like an importunate rat. Mary changed colour as Mary Seton glided to it, and much to her own surprise admitted Darnley, flushed and gay, with blue eyes a little over-excited and feverish with good wine and food. He kissed Mary's hand, and looked in astonishment on the other two members of the singular conclave.

"And who is this gentleman?" he asked with a glance over his shoulder that added a contemptuous note to the question. Mary rose with dignity.

"It is one of the most honourable of my servants—a gentleman to whom I am proud to present my cousin. This is Signor David Riccio, my true and faithful secretary whose name is as well-known to you as my own."

Darnley saw his mistake instantly. He stopped and bowed with marked respect: the Queen's tone compelled it.

"I am glad—more than glad—honoured to meet Signor David Riccio. I shall hope in future to deserve his friendship."

It was graciously said, and Riccio bowed and re-seating himself studied the young handsome face with courtesy

which could not hide the deep slow inquiry shaping within. Darnley winced a little. His direct gaze faltered and dropped. Touchy as a woman, sensitive in all that concerned his own dignity, his resentment was instant at the calm of Riccio's manner, and the evident intimacy of friendship and respect between him and Mary. He noted it as a matter on which she should certainly hear his mind when he was more secure in the saddle. That meeting from which Mary hoped so much was not to be a success.

Riccio formed his own opinion from his own knowledge and present observation, and with a hidden sigh went quietly on with his business. There again Darnley listened with displeasure and suspicion. Moray had received him kindly, Morton and Ruthven had followed their leader. He was so vain of his personal graces that he could swear he would capture their fidelity, and as Mary watched his young eagerness her love-blinded eyes were more than half disposed to agree. At least Darnley would win Signor David if only for the sake of a common passion for music. He rose to keep a tennis engagement before the debate was ended and took a most courteous farewell of the little secretary. No sooner was the door shut than Mary leaned forward to him eagerly.

"Signor David, how do you read my Lord?"

He looked at her and answered with his usual tranquillity: "No finer-made man can be, Madam. A noble father for a Queen's son. But young, and as I hope apt to learn, for the way is not straight in Scotland. Will he be said by Your Majesty?"

"He professes himself absolutely at my devotion. What I demand that he will do. It is a sacred promise because he remembers my office, and that in Scotland I must lead. But Signor David—" she hesitated and was confused for a moment—"he presses me for a secret marriage immediately, saying that when the Lords know the deed is done they will take it more kindly."

Silence. Mary Seton's heart beat quicker with suppressed excitement. To bind herself so soon and irrevocably—was this the Queen's wisdom? She recalled the words sung at the last banquet—Mary's choice for accompanying a pageant of blindfold Love:

And this is Love? The world will call him so
Yet he is bitter as thou seest, I trow,
And at a future time shall clearly see,
When Love who is our Master rules o'er thee.

Bitter indeed! It shook her very soul with fear to see that other soul, so brave and loyal, made captive to what she saw to be a threadbare intelligence.

Noting the silence, Mary said hurriedly: "We will talk of this later, you and I, and I shall have your aid to plan the matter. It is indeed resolved between my Lord and me but will not be easy to come at. Meet me here again at six in the morning, Signor David, that I may give you all the reasons. And forgive my Lord's surprise, for that will pass when he knows better."

Riccio bowed.

"Madam, I expect little, and here may tell you I have had a great warning that the Lords are vexed to the bone by the confidence you accord me and our conferences. Madam, so loyal is my heart that should you think well to cease and use me but as a common secretary I am content, so it be for your good."

She cried out in horror.

"What? And leave me friendless and uncounselled and worse—ungrateful to my best friend? Never, while I last! On the contrary, when I am free and with a husband's sword to guard me I will the more mark the honours I intend you. Be sure of that!"

Riccio bowed and was silent, digesting the matter in his mind after his own fashion. At the door, he turned, bowing again.

"Madam, a last matter. Have you kept your secret cipher in a safe place, for I have some reason to think that some of your letters to your envoys in England have been read. Is it possible?"

"It is impossible," she answered eagerly. "None but those as trustworthy as myself have had access to the key. That I swear!"

The door closed, he was gone. Mary Seton stood silent, waiting the Queen's command. She sighed instead of speaking.

"Is anything wholly happy in this world, Mary Seton?

I could be happy with my Lord if the world would let me be. But I dread this secret marrying, and my brother. If what Signor David says of him is true what hope have I? And I dread committing myself by a secret marriage but my Lord will have it, saying the Queen of England will find means to separate us if there is any delay. I tremble in thinking of it."

"I also tremble," said Mary Seton in a voice very low and troubled. "You must marry, it seems, Mary Stuart, but is this long laddie the man of men to you? Could you not be happy wanting him?"

Pure rose-glow stole over the Queen's pale face like dawn on virgin snow. She looked Mary Seton in the eyes notwithstanding.

"I think I cannot," she said.

Again a silence. Kneeling, Mary Seton kissed her hand.

"Then so it must be, my heart's heart, and I pray God to have pity on your love."

She extinguished the lamps one by one and led the Queen to the bed-chamber in which since Chastelard's ruin she always slept beside her Mistress. Her prayers were long and earnest that night.

The very next day arrived a letter from Elizabeth, hurriedly presented by Randolph. By Riccio's advice, offered as her own to her Council, Mary had written to Elizabeth to declare that she could only consider Dudley as a husband if Elizabeth would first acknowledge her Heir Apparent to the Crown of England.

"For that she will never do," said he, "and so you will be rid, Madam, of a bad bargain." Here and now was the answer, and Mary quaked during the reading lest some terrible concession should make her marriage with Darnley impossible at last. It was however as Riccio foretold. Elizabeth wrote that if the Queen of Scots would marry Dudley she would then advance him to higher honours, and would in all things ensure her claim to the succession, *short of declaring it publicly*. Mary's heart beat again with relief but also with anger which it was politic at the moment to express.

"She treats me like a puppet, pretending good things and receding always when the time of fulfilment comes. Tell your Queen, Mr. Randolph, that I am no puppet, and

I scorn such devices and will have none of my Lord Robert Dudley. Let her keep him as she intended from the first, and I will take my own way with my own fortunes."

She rose, darting lightnings at him from angry eyes, and swept from the room like a goddess. Randolph gathered up his papers with philosophy and a remark over his shoulder to Riccio.

"And there ends that! And what else is in the wind, I wonder? But such a beauty will have her way. One might suppose the very Gods would be good to her, and yet I know that few have such cares upon such young shoulders."

For the first moment, he allowed himself to realize her difficulties. And none could measure them better for he knew the "back of behind," as the saying is, and dangers she could never know till they threw her.

She had never impressed him more, never so heartily won his liking as in that minute, probably because she had always been under more or less constraint until love and anger transported her into naked nature. The result was odd enough. He pitied her—he the man of wax and ice! Pitied her so far that he would venture a plea, and if it be incredible, his letter lives to prove it. Accompanying an extremely flattering letter to Elizabeth, he wrote also to Sidney in England words which if cautiously deciphered might make some plea for consideration for the sorely tried Heiress of the Crown, some word that might gain her an honest hearing. He did it consideredly too. Dazzled for a moment, it appeared to him that the womanly sweetness of her nature might yet baffle plots and make them useless if she were fairly used. There might be peace on better terms than victory, even for England. He hinted as much to Sidney:

> "If she had been unknown or never seen by your Lordship, you might well marvel what divine thing it is by whom this felicity may be achieved. To that which you yourself have seen is now so much added of perfect beauty that in beholding her person you will find all turned into a new nature far excelling anything (our own most worthy Sovereign only excepted) that ever was made since the first framing of mankind."

He smiled a little over his letter but pondered it still. "If Dudley owned the wit of a mouse, he could persuade Elizabeth to consent, or Mary to forgo the claim to announcing the succession," he thought to himself. "Were I in his shoes, I would see to it with both if I must pay the debt in kisses!"—and so, still smiling, added a word more to Sidney, reflecting that love is a mighty master:

> "Even John Knox is not so bitter in his preaching since his marriage to a young wife, as when last you heard him. What a softener is love! I doubt whether I myself am the same man, having the whole guiding not only of the Queen and her kingdom here, but also the most worthy Beton to be ruled at my own will!"

It would not be Randolph without a hint of his own consequence. He read the letter twice over.

No, no use! Still he would send it. And probably, its existence is the greatest proof extant of Mary's conquering charm.

He went off next to find the worthy Beton and probe her most thoroughly as to Darnley's position with the Queen.

But even Mary Beton could not tell what she did not know, and none but Mary Seton guessed that the Queen had flown off to Darnley from Randolph's presence, and in a passion of love, and anger with Moray given her consent to a secret marriage. Bound by honour though with ever-increasing terrors Mary Seton kept even her guess hidden, utterly distrusting Darnley's swagger. Others also distrusted it. Messengers from the Queen's own relatives in France implored her to consider before she bartered away her royal liberty for love such as a quarrelsome swaggering fop could give her. He had already aroused Moray's deep and lasting venom also by looking over a map of his territories in Scotland, and growling that it was too much for any one subject. Moray went to Mary over it, scowling under dangerous brows and pressing Dudley's suit. Everywhere were angers and distrusts and her heart fainted within her, though not her love.

She fled to Stirling for a little rest and peace from the eternal plottings, and to serve a purpose of her own with

which Moray was not to be acquainted. Randolph followed, more steadily on the scent than ever, but holding his own so well as a man of the world as to have become almost necessary in the Queen's circle, especially as an attack of measles at Stirling disabled Darnley and gave Randolph the task of amusing the ladies in his place. Riccio was there also naturally enough. How could the Queen stir without her private secretary? But he kept himself so much in the background, and was so humble and assiduous that neither Randolph nor anyone else attached the slightest importance to his presence. They little knew that in Riccio's working-room in Stirling Castle, before a hastily-fitted altar Mary Stuart had challenged Fate, and the marriage had taken place in the presence of Mary Seton and a few more chosen friends.

Yet it was soon known to Randolph through an unguarded word which the Queen dropped when her Maries were about her. A word, no more, as to their own early freedom to follow Mary Livingstone's example and wed. Mary Beton sped with it to Randolph. He hurried it to Cecil, and in a few days more suspicion was a roaring flame —especially when an attack of ague followed the measles and Mary took Darnley's sick room under her own care, and showed such anxiety as to his recovery as completely confirmed the worthy Beton's guess at the secret marriage.

Mary summoned Moray and the nobles to Stirling "to consider of my marriage with Lord Darnley," and to sign an approval of it, and of her granting him the crown-matrimonial as a result of the marriage, for that he would have as a wedding gift. Many signed it but Moray steadfastly refused. It was easy with John Knox's concurrence to put it on the ground of objection "to one of whom there was so little hope that he would be a favourer of Christ's true religion," though few did not guess Moray's true motive—the dazzling hope of regency or the crown of Scotland. It appeared to Moray and his adherents that such talents of rule as his would make a trifle of the bar sinister and his mother's shame. He would not be the first bastard who had mounted a throne and done handsomely on it.

But his time was not yet. Openly in Stirling Castle Mary declared her intention to her nobles, setting forth that

Darnley was of her own blood, her father's nephew, that in his person met her own claims—thereby strengthening them—with so many other good and cogent reasons that there was no single dissentient, and Moray himself grudgingly allowed that since the other Lords had agreed it would be well to do the same. The deed was done, the betrothal publicly acknowledged, and Darnley created Duke of Albany as a step to the rank of King Consort. Furious letters from Elizabeth on receiving Randolph's information of the secret marriage came too late—too late, alas, for Mary as well as for her enemies.

For already the bridegroom was showing the baser strain of presumption. With certainty installed, wisdom and decency flew out by the windows leaving the house-door open for enemies to enter. And Randolph, taking up his industrious pen summed up the situation better than any but an observer on the spot could hope to do.

> "Men talk very strangely. Her husband's pride is intolerable, his words not to be borne except by men who dare not speak again. Also, in token of his manhood he lets fly blows where he is sure they will be accepted. Such passions, such furies, as I hear he will sometimes be in is strange to believe! I leave it to the world to think what cause this people has to rejoice in their worthy prince! They believe that God must send him a short end or themselves a miserable life to live under such government as this is likely to be. To remedy this mischief he must be taken away. If our Queen does not wish to do it by force, with the expenditure of three or four thousand pounds she can do with this country what she will."

Plain speaking and a plain hint of Darnley's end! Randolph had indeed repented of his plea for a woman who could saddle herself with obedience to a fool. Her exquisite charm had dazzled him for a moment but he saw straight now, straight to the end, and never missed it.

Terror might well seize the soul of Mary in considering to what a pass she had brought herself and Scotland. Portents gathered thick and dark about her, beginning with an angry summons from Elizabeth to Darnley to return at once

to England and to his allegiance as her subject, and the imprisonment of his mother Lady Lennox in the Tower. The angry nobles were muttering, dismayed by English wrath and Darnley's madness, and Randolph wrote with sinister frankness to Mr. Secretary Cecil in England:

> "What shall become of him, I do not know, but it is greatly to be feared he can have no long life among this people."

He had the best reason for knowing of what he wrote, for Moray skulked secretly to him to ask if Elizabeth would take possession of Darnley and his father Lennox if the Scots handed them over to the English at Berwick, and had the encouraging reply that England would certainly take her own in whatever way she could come at them.

Full of the prospect of glutted vengeance, Moray instantly laid his plans for a reliance better than Elizabeth's uncertain caprice. Now was the time to strike. He would capture Mary and Darnley and his father Lennox, and turn the two men and their responsibility straight over to England—then claim his reward. For Mary had promised to ride to Callander House to stand godmother to the child of Lord and Lady Livingstone, and knowing only Darnley and Lennox and her three Maries to be with her, beside a slender guard, Moray prepared an ambush in three places on her road. If she escaped one the other two were ready successively. Darnley and his father would either be murdered on the spot or handed over to England. Mary would be sent a prisoner to Lochleven Castle under the jailership of Moray's mother, the mistress of her late father, a woman so bitter and vindictive that they could count on her safe keeping of her son's rival. All was sure and certain as men could make it and his heart throbbed within him.

But Mary had a note of warning which a bird she could trust whistled in at the window of her chamber.

"I will go!" she said to Mary Seton, springing to her feet, bright with pride and anger. "They shall neither daunt me nor catch me. We will start six hours early and let the world see which is the cunningest."

They started at five in the morning, without reason known to any but the Seton, and Mary led them like a queen and

heroine, rousing the country as she went until hundreds of men-at-arms had gathered round her, riding in mocking triumph past the empty places of ambush where Moray's trap would be set a few hours later, riding, riding through brilliant morning sunshine, flushed with hope and victory—a bird escaped from the snare and soaring skyward. And so to Callander, and in her joy consented to attend the Protestant sermon after the christening—a thing to set all men agape with wonder.

Moray might gnash his teeth, Morton and Ruthven scowl, but a woman's wit had dashed their plans to earth.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN all this was known Elizabeth's wrath exploded in violent letters to Mary, who could afford to heed them the less because she had at last gained consent to her marriage from her mother-in-law the Queen-Mother of France and the young King. They wrote that: "Since it was not the will of God for her to be the consort of the Duke of Anjou (the King's younger brother) their Majesties could see no objection to her matching herself with her kinsman Lord Darnley, who was much more acceptable to them than the Archduke Charles or the Prince of Spain." And thus armed she hoped she could not only defy Elizabeth's insolence by the public marriage, but also with regard to her independent and violent insistence that Moray and the other traitors should not be punished for their attempt against the Scots Queen's life and liberty. So great was the public reaction in her favour in this matter that but for Darnley's madness she might have put even Elizabeth in fear, as he boasted madly that they would do. It was a moment for the utmost delicacy of tact in dealing with Elizabeth and the rest of the world, and to stand by her—there was Darnley!

To begin his madness, neither the earldom of Ross nor the royal dukedom of Albany would content him.

He entered her cabinet before the public marriage with a new plea.

"You cannot marry less than a king, and less than a king should not dare to marry you. The title of king is my due and my due I will have."

He stood by the carved table where she sat. Not even Riccio was with her. He had demanded a conference alone and she sat prepared to hear. But the demand shook her with alarm, and a threatening of scorn. She looked at him as he stood above her, handsome, foolish, unprincipled,

still dear to her but a new anxiety instead of a barrier against the old. She caught him up sharply.

"I have created you Duke of Albany—a royal title. That must suffice until we can gain the consent of the Estates of Scotland. I have no power to give you kingship without them. It is not legal, it is child's folly——"

He broke in raging: "I am a child, am I? And a beggar that must owe all to a woman's favour? I will show you that my blood is as good as your own and my right higher as your husband. What I demand I will have or it will be the worse for us both. It is that vile Italian of yours disputes my right. I know it."

"Hear reason!" she entreated, seriously alarmed. "Wait until you are twenty-one. It is not long. Wait for the consent of the Estates. Let us give no weapon to our enemies. You have my promise. Wait only for the first moment of safety and it is yours."

He stood there raging in one of the storms which Randolph had described to Cecil—a young fool crying intractably for the moon.

"I will have it announced before the marriage. Am I to endure flouting not only from the witch of England but from my wife who has sworn obedience? Am I to be despised by all the world—and no remedy? I swear by the living God I will not bear it. I will sooner go seek my fortune in France."

The dispute raged for an hour—she holding to her resolution with failing strength, he storming with sullen, shameful obstinacy, exhausting her pleas and courage.

At last, pale and wearied, she rose.

"I cannot resist you when you plead my sworn obedience, though it is known of Queens that they cannot promise away their sovereignty in matters of State."

"This is none. It is personal to myself and you."

"All that is personal to me is a matter of State," she answered steadily, "and this in especial because it defies my Estates. Yet I will grant it if it buys your forbearance in other matters. Will you promise me obedience otherwise in matters which need State sanction?"

"I will promise anything," he said eagerly, "if only I have my heart's desire there."

"Then you shall have it. But remember—" she looked

at him mournfully for a pausing second—"remember you compel me to a fatal wedding gift. You arm Moray and our foes. You offend our friends. Will you still have it?"

"I will have it. You are a woman. I am a man who fears none but God Almighty."

She said no more, hoping delay might bring wisdom, but his will held, and the very day before the marriage she was compelled to proclaim him King of Scotland by her own royal right, with the addition that in future all writs and processes were to run in their joint names as King and Queen of Scotland, for that he extorted also. And knowing her own weakness her hand shook so in signing that she could scarcely hold the pen, and when Moray heard it he struck his hand on his sword-hilt and cried aloud: "By God, I have her!" His way lay clear before him now, and he would not have undone that marriage for all the wrath of Elizabeth and more. He foresaw it was to ruin her and give him fulfilment of all ambitions.

Nothing now could undo the weaving of that dark web of Fate, and the very next day in the Chapel Royal of Holyrood crowded with nobles and ladies, she entered still robed in mourning weeds for the French King, and the marriage was made fast between her and the long lad in the face of Holy Church and the world.

Randolph, in pursuance of Elizabeth's policy refused to be present either then or at the festivity, or at the later scene when Darnley leading the men entreated her in all their names "to lay aside those sorrowful garments and dispose herself to a pleasanter life;" and in spite of her pretty refusals every man stole a pin from her dress until, the ladies closing round her, she was driven to her chamber laughing, and thence returned most gloriously decked as a glittering silver bride.

But the bitter first-fruit of Darnley's folly was reaped in a tumult of the people which lasted all that night, and next day the proclamation of his title as King of Scotland made in the presence of all the Lords extracted not a single cheer or amen, except from his own father. The silence was not only ominous but sinister.

And at the look in her face and the answering frown in Darnley's, Randolph whispered with glee to the first secre-

tary of the English embassy: "The spiteful fool! How does she endure him? She that is a wonder of majesty and modesty! You might take him for King of the world rather than the very ordinary Darnley. But happily for England she is no less than the best of wives. What he wills he takes. And so our game is played."

The secretary shrugged his shoulders.

"She will, maybe, get her reward in his docility later."

"Not she! She can as soon persuade him to do anything as you persuade me to hang myself. He has neither sense nor manners and so it will be seen."

It was seen soon enough in civil war, in the gathering of the rebel lords to take the field against her— with subsidies of gold from Elizabeth, received and acknowledged by Lady Moray with little care for secrecy. Mary, knowing all rested on herself, fought for her fool and herself like a Queen and a heroine. She took the field in steel cuirass and flying locks and shining eyes above it. Who could resist her? The gentlemen of Scotland flocked to her standard, whether Catholic or Protestant, and Moray who had faced her in battle—staking all on a general rising of the Protestants—was terror-stricken as the net closed in upon him and forced him into flying sullen resistance. It had become painfully evident that he had struck too soon, and that much spade-work remained to be done before he could attack his sister with any degree of safety. She had won, and laughing with scorn waited his next move—Elizabeth sick with anger in London.

Moray sat at the head of the table, sinister as his portrait shows him—a fox-eyed man with a Tudor fairness of complexion, and swift shifty glances to right and left as the rebel lords tramped in to hear what might be their doom in the defeats to which he had led them. There was Argyll, husband of his sister; Ruthven grim and ghastly from the chronic sickness which devoured his vitals; Lethington; Lindsay of the Byres, and many more who had hoped to portion Scotland among themselves, and now saw Mary more firmly seated on the throne. It was a bitter, sullen gathering. With Elizabeth's powerful aid and subsidies they had little expected this result, and after the manner of human nature the wolf-hounds were ready enough to turn on their master—fangs bared and gleaming.

Lord Lindsay of the Byres, a man of iron face and purpose, rose without the courtesy of waiting Moray's word.

"And now what is our course? She has driven us from pillar to post, and the sight of her riding armed in the van of the army with pistols by her side has done her more good than crown and sceptre together. The Scots love the spark of courage. She can ask and have in Scotland this day."

"You might own, my Lord Moray," interrupted Morton, "that your follies have given her an army of twenty thousand men to back her will. Was ever such madness known in the world's history? That the Lords of Scotland should lie at a girl's foot! She has shown more wisdom and courage than her brother, all said and done, and if I were not so deep in——"

"You are so deep in that it is up to your neck and more, and a neck is handy for a rope, be it even an earl's, or for the headsman's axe more likely," said Ruthven with a bitter sneer. "Well, my Lord Moray, how goes it? You have had your throw and lost more than your own winnings if I have my reason left me."

Argyll lifted his handsome face and looked down the long oak table to his brother-in-law Moray silent at its head, half buried in his great almost royal chair.

"Brother, we have not one Queen but two to reckon with, and for this defeat Elizabeth's little finger will be thicker upon us than Mary's loins. She is one that likes ill to have her business tangled and her hard gold spent to no purpose. No good to blame one another, say I! That will but deliver us all into the women's hands. What way out? Nothing on earth matters to us but to save our lands and gear, and our necks, without which they shall profit us little."

A pause and Lord Maxwell flung in a contemptuous word.

"For all she is a woman she is better counselled and has shown herself a better general than we. If it were not for her upstart of a husband a man might do worse than serve such a lass with heart and sword. And, fool as he is, she has strengthened herself in England by that marriage, as I have sure word, for the English love a man of their own blood and upbringing. Carmichael writes me that her party there grows daily, and the English northern lords are stirring against Elizabeth. We may see our Queen great in England

any moment some base-born plotter makes an end of Elizabeth, which may chance one day. Go cautiously. It is a subtle mouse that sleeps in the cat's ear!"

Silence from Moray still—his pale Tudor face showing no workings of his mind, his light grey eyes travelling from one speaker to the other, expressionless save for intense watchfulness.

Lethington, smooth and close as wax, took up the word.

"It is time you spoke your mind, my Lord Moray. I have secret word that to fill our places the Queen has recalled Bothwell from exile, and is gathering about her the men you disgraced while you held the reins—men of power in the land. And if our places are filled and we are outlaws —what good is left us?"

At last Moray spoke. He stood a little stooped, leaning one bare hand on the table as if he supported himself by it. Not a trace of emotion in his concealing face and secret eyes. His voice echoed clear and resonant in the lofty ceiling.

"My Lords, God Almighty has been pleased to avenge our sins upon us in the shape of defeat at my false sister's hand, and I lament this the less because contrition and humbling ourselves before His offended Majesty will restore us to His grace, as may be hoped. Now, for I see dismay in your faces despite all your courage, I would say—mark attentively what I put forward and judge if there is reason in it for I submit myself to your wisdom.

"Now first, I counsel that we acknowledge defeat to ourselves. Our army has melted from under us to strengthen hers. Our money is spent, our ammunition also. You acknowledge this?"

"We acknowledge," came a stern chorus.

"Then it is my counsel that we send letters to the Queen offering submission and a return to our allegiance—providing she will restore our forfeit estates and places, permit us to choose her Council, dismiss all foreigners and refrain from the use of her Mass."

He paused. Silence, and a contemptuous snort from Ruthven.

"And she being victorious will grant these terms! God pity the daft!"

"I think it, my Lords. She is the most tender-hearted

woman, and would nourish the whole world at her breast-fountains if she could. Look how she forgives ! To see a man suffer—especially me—is more than she can hold to, and she loves me."

" I think her no such fool after the stand you have made against her. Have sense, man, and talk no more of love when we have axes and ropes to face ! " shouted Lord Lindsay. " Judge her as you would act yourself, and to business ! How much do you love her ? "

" She is as I have said," Moray answered with unruffled calm. " For she is delicate-natured. She has courage certainly and fire but for all that her heart governs her. A very woman. Count on it. But there is more. That mention of foreigners which I propose aims at Riccio. He is the mainspring of her Counsel against us—a crafty Italian with as many schemes as hairs. A match for Randolph and more. We must be rid of that man and the country roused against him. Also the Scots people must learn the Queen's qualities as *we* choose to state them. Kindly to those she affections, subtle and cruel to those she will destroy, false as hell, knowing no pity. Also we must gain the fool Darnley, and convince him that such she is, and his best reliance to throw his lot in with us—especially to the destruction of Riccio who is his enemy. For there—" He cleared his throat once or twice as if to remove a hoarseness and added : " I have reason to fear—and a man does not speak lightly of his own sister and Queen—that the little Italianate scoundrel is more to her than should be, and rules her by means disgraceful to be spoken. Very woman, I say again. You all know the sex."

A long silence. Lindsay struck his hand on the table.

" You have proof of this ? "

" Proof."

" Then if it be so I say we will have no Italian bastard on the throne, and will be ruled by the counsels of no Queen's lover. If the sot Darnley cannot oversee his wife we will oversee her for him."

There was not a man present who did not fully comprehend Moray's lies and objects—but they were in a sore strait and his subtle audacity won them. A campaign of calumny to succeed the foiled campaign of the sword. Who can counter calumny ? The simplicity of the scheme also

recommended it. What might not be believed in Scotland of a woman, a Catholic, brought up in the vices of a court headed by the Italian Catherine dei Medicis, with her Renaissance lusts and wicked culture and magnificence. Loathsome to all Scots hearts.

"Ay, she would learn her Italian pleasures well enough with the French!" said Ruthven with a smile that matched Lethington's. Moray went on rigidly, careless of interruption.

"But if Her Grace would be said by us and accept our counsels, I suppose there is not a man here that would injure her by any disclosures against her honour. We are indeed the most loyal of her subjects for we fight for good government and religion, and to save her from her own follies as right is—owing the duty we do to our Lady and Queen. And now let me hear your wills."

A stormy discussion followed dominated all through by Moray's master-mind. Finally his counsel was adopted, and the letter offering return to their allegiance sent by a sure envoy—Moray pointing out that her open refusal to relinquish her foreigners and the Mass would do her more hurt in Scotland than a lost battle. Then he sat down to wait with the patience of the weasel stalking its game.

She replied with scorn. It was not the moment in which surrender to traitors could appeal to her, and her new ministers were not likely to show much sympathy with forgiveness. They had their own wrongs to avenge on Moray, and knew him well for what he was. Her direct answer was to take the field with a great army and to enter Dumfries in triumph, drums beating, colours flying. Discredited, disheartened, with Scotland rising against them, the rebel lords had done with Moray for the moment. He was down and out. They fled across the English Border to shelter themselves behind Elizabeth's ample petticoats. The war with sword and spear was over for the present; the baser war of calumny was to begin with every art that skill and fear could lend them.

But even across the Border all was astir and thrilling with Mary's triumph. A woman, a Queen, a beauty of twenty-two, leading her own troops, driving her traitors to flight, shielding her husband—an English prince sprung of their own blood-royal—could not leave the hearts of the

English noblemen in the north unmoved. Many of them belonged to great Catholic families who had viewed Elizabeth's accession with deep alarm. Her hand had been near as heavy on Catholics as her sister Bloody Mary's on the Reformers. Cumberland and Northumberland were shaken to their roots by Mary Stuart's victories. She was the drama of Europe, and the romantic passion which followed her, go where she would, was a starry presence disturbing to men's minds—wooing them to her side even against their interests and convictions. As Catherine dei Medicis had said long since she had but to smile or weep to turn the heads of all about her. She was turning English heads too—a new issue in the duel between her and the English Queen.

That was what Elizabeth's shrewd instinct dreaded in Mary as her utmost peril. She had come to the throne herself at twenty-five, handsome as queens go, keen-edged with intelligence and statecraft—a true lover of England even if she loved herself much better. Surely she too might use Romance as her lady-in-waiting and see eyes kindle at the mention of her name? But no. The wooings which flattered her hope of Venus's empire as well as England's—a hope fiercer and fiercer as she passed her thirtieth year—must come as much from her as from the men she favoured. Was it her Queendom which set her too high for advances? That had not protected Mary. For Elizabeth men needed baiting with familiarities and freedoms of which not even her bitterest enemies had as yet accused her rival, and often the woman's unsleeping instinct in Elizabeth read the sexual coldness underlying all the flatteries of poets and courtiers. It was bitter—unendurable. And this unexpected victory was wormwood! When had she ever had a chance to lead charging men, to inspire armies with such beauty and fire as made it a privilege to die under eyes which rained rewards nearer to their hearts than gold or lands? The very Fates fought on Mary's side, providing her always with the stage, the background on which she must shine and flood the world with her sweet lunar light darkening all else to shadow.

And there was fear as well. At these victories France and Spain would lift rejoicing heads, their ambassadors would cloak with smooth words their glee in Elizabeth's discomfiture. How should she receive the rebel lords fleeing

to her protection, her money wasted, and herself exposed in Europe as the one who had fomented plots against a neighbouring Sovereign? The guild of kings was so close that she would be judged a traitor to that bond of royalty which held them all, for she had broken the eleventh and greatest of the commandments: "Thou shalt not be found out."

Therefore if Moray hoped for any sympathy in that high quarter he and his confederates did not yet know their Elizabeth. It was only after repeated refusals and humble intercession when he got to London, tail between his legs, that Moray could get audience at all. There was nothing for him but scorn and contemptuous silence, which in other quarters took the shape of open English jeering at the fugitives routed by a woman. And when at last his humble plea for a hearing was granted, how far from comforting was the meeting! She received him in state, seated in a chair which reminded the beholder that its occupant filled a throne, in case her haughty ungracious manner permitted him for a moment to forget it. Now thirty-two, care and a haughty irritable temper had traced sharp lines about her mouth, and lit a hard surface-gleam in her eyes. Even in peaceful moments her manner was hard and pecking as a parrot's, and suspicion was never asleep for an instant. She looked Moray up and down as a mistress who calls a servant to task for service undone, and Kilwinning who had entered behind him with some hint of boldness, subsided instantly and crawled, as the glare of her eyes swept him. For there was a fierce bullying majesty in her that went well with the amazing magnificence and sovereignty of her dress stiff with pearls and gold and glittering jewels, the false yellow hair on her head matted with rubies and emeralds in scrolls and serpents, until scarcely a hair showed except about her face. She looked the royal termagant she was, as the men knelt before her—Cecil and Dudley behind her with implacable faces. That white hand heavy with diamonds was not for Moray's kissing that day!

"And what would you have with me, rebels to your indulgent Mistress and to my good sister and cousin?" was the first question.

The shock of it! Moray went white to his teeth. It was impossible for him to speak his needs—the list was so long.

Shelter and protection, money, aid—public and private—a ready ear for calumny, and much more, impossible to be stated in words. All these he must have to live.

He said, still on his knees that what he hoped was twofold. "I desire to justify our course by submitting to Your Majesty's gracious consideration the misdeeds of our Queen, in that she is governed by foreigners, that she made a marriage displeasing to her faithful subjects and to Your Majesty and——"

"What is it to me whom she marries?" shot in Elizabeth, "and wherefore should her rebels justify themselves to me that am a foreign prince to them and will so remain? And if she is governed by foreigners, which I little credit, knowing her good-will and great wisdom, again what is that to me? I meddle not with her affairs."

Such audacities daunted even Moray. At that moment her gold was heavy in his pockets. Letters from her ministers crowded his secret repositories in Scotland. He had believed that he pulled the strings and Elizabeth and her ministers danced—to gain their own ends, true—but danced! And now who was dancing? He made another attempt.

"We did not fight against our lawful Queen's authority. She is under the dominion of a base Italian secretary whose will is to inspire her with hatred against Your Majesty, and Mr. Randolph can assure Your Grace how much love is left in her for you. And her passion for this secretary—to the shame and humiliation of her lawful husband—is what no loyal subject can bear. And if dissensions are stirred up between Scotland and England——"

"Silence, man,—fool, I call you!" shouted Elizabeth. "Have I not said I will hear no word against my good sister that is of my own blood? Hold your false tongue, base-born cur! You disparage me in her, and all sovereigns, and by God's death and the blood of Christ I will have none of it. Know that!"

Moray played his last card. She should feel the steel within his velvet glove:

"Madam, I say in private what I could prove in public, that we have had your aid in all our enterprises against our Sovereign, aid in money and in kind and in cheerful and comfortable letters with which my portfolios are stuffed.

And now that we have failed for the time you disown us as right may be. But I say this—the time will come when she will not escape us, and when we hand her bound to your royal wisdom to deal with, what then ? "

There was a deadly silence which gave him hope he had hit his mark. A moment passed. She rose tall above him on the step of her chair, and addressed the two quivering on their knees, her voice ringing through the room.

" My men, it may be that your Sovereign's mercy has spoilt you and you think you can sow your lies where you will ! I tell you this to your false faces—I never aided you with gold piece or writing. Now I know the fount of falsity that has sown suspicions and mistrusts between your Queen and me ! I never desired but one thing ; to see her reigning in wisdom and joy as a noble and fortunate princess should. On your knees you have lied, on your knees you shall unsay your lies in the face of Europe. Have in the French and Spanish ambassadors, Cecil ! Lead them in, Dudley, and tell them they shall see two traitors swallow their words in God's name. Tell them what has passed."

It was a moment in Moray's life that he never forgot, a lesson driven in upon him with branding irons that seared. The slow way of calumny under Elizabeth's own guidance was the only safety. She should indeed pull the strings in future, and he would be her slave until his victory was won, and then she too should taste the venom in the cup he had offered Mary. He remained kneeling, with Kilwinning kneeling behind him, heads bowed, minds furiously working, but no redress at hand. The future ! Only the future to uphold them.

The Ambassadors entered jewelled and perfumed, men chosen for courtly manners as well as astuteness and diplomatic skill. Cecil had briefly informed them of the facts. They withheld their bows from the victims in deference to the Queen's wrath, and their own deep though private satisfaction at their humiliation.

The Queen, seated again, waved a peremptory hand.

" Announce to these gentlemen that I have had neither art nor part in your foul dealings with your lawful Queen, and be brief."

Writhing inwardly Moray began his abjuration in English with his broad Scots accent. She stopped him rudely.

"French is the language of the European courts. Speak French that you may be clearly understood. We will have no mistakes here!"

"Madam, I speak it ill. I can be plainer in English."

"French I will have. You understand it well enough for my purpose. And the briefer the better."

No help. He staggered on in French, sick at heart at the glance he of Spain cast at him of France.

"Madam, I acknowledge before these gentlemen that we, the rebel lords, have had neither aid, promise, nor pay from Your Majesty in our rebellion, and this I swear in your presence and that of God Almighty."

She shot a glance of triumph about her which Cecil and Dudley met as seriously as the rest.

"Now at last you have told the truth, for neither did I nor any in my name stir you up against your Queen. Reason good—it is impossible; for your abominable treason might serve for example to my own subjects against me. Therefore pack out of my presence for the unworthy traitors you are. Begone!"

They slunk out.

That night Elizabeth wrote a warmly affectionate letter to Mary congratulating her on her victories.

> "And I could have wished that your ears had been judges to hear the honour and affection I have manifested toward you, completely disproving what is stated—that I defended your rebel subjects against you."

That night Moray said slowly to Kilwinning: "Guile succeeds where swords shatter. Next time we will not fail, and this Queen shall pay for this day while the world lasts."

Henceforth he took Elizabeth's secretly fair words as a man who bides his time. He would use her, for he must. But his day would come.

CHAPTER XII

MARY received that letter with joy which doubled her victories. She saw in it the beginning of the end of the English plotting in Scotland, for surely a queen so shamed by the world's talk of her intrigue would never again dare to use such soiled and discredited tools as Moray and his beaten curs! Copies were circulated in all parts of Scotland that reasonable men might take heed and risk themselves no further in rebellion. But in her own loving heart she had a deeper and more enduring reason for joy—a reason of which the first was a part. She was with child. For Scotland and England an heir, one in whose veins the blood of Stuarts and Tudors mingled, to be recognized as Sovereign by both peoples. She might now have touched the summit of earthly happiness but for the "if" and "but" which dog all human effort.

Happiness could not be shared with Darnley whose sole notions of pleasure lay in dice and drink and women, and there were griefs in her own inmost circle wounding to her tenderness of long years. Even among the Maries there was discord. For Mary Fleming had disappointed her by coquetries with the Englishman Killigrew which had drawn the coarsest gossip of the court; Mary Livingstone, true and sweet, was the wife of Sempill, and no more lay in her bosom; and between the Queen and Mary Beton had sprung up a chill like the cold of sunset in the air, though nothing was known of her guilt with Randolph. But in compensation Mary Seton grew dearer to her daily; their love ceased to be girlish and fluctuating, and took on a womanly calm and depth. It was not demonstrative on either side but a part of the inner life of both, and Mary tasted at this time some moments of deep and secret thought that ignored all grief as she sat with Mary Seton in her cabinet, thinking, planning, dreaming for the prince to be;

the lesser Mary stitching at her embroidery, stealing a glance now and then at her Queen as if to share in the great thoughts—for great they were—passing in vision before her inner eyes.

"You think deeply, Mary Stuart," she said one day, laying down her needle and gazing at her with frank hazel eyes, "Is it of the child?"

"It is of him and of all he means, Mary Seton. I will that he shall be a great king, and I join my prayers to my will. I know well I took my sovereignty too lightly. I have done little enough for it though I loved my people——"

"You have done much in spite of my Lord Moray's hindrance. Good roads, justice for the poor, mercy to the hard Knox and his followers and more. These are not small things."

"Smaller than my dreams. Hear one of them. I note them on paper, that when my son is a man grown he may read and know his mother thought of something better than wars and power and riches. Where I fail he shall succeed."

"May I know, also, Your Grace?"

"You shall know. I have written this for my son to consider and I will enforce it if I live through childbirth. Therefore I command you, Mary Seton, that if I decease you shall set this before him patiently as I would myself."

It was a touching sign of her loneliness that she must commit so great a matter to a powerless girl, having none other to trust. Tears sprang in Mary Seton's eyes as the Queen took a paper and read: "What ought a monarch to do if his ancestors have ennobled a man of worth whose posterity has become degenerate? Must the King because of the wise and valiant father honour a son who is undeserving, selfish and a law-breaker? If, on the other hand, the King finds a man of low degree, poor as the world goes but generous, faithful, and serviceable, may he not dare give such a one power because the nobles having clutched all offices desire to do so still?"

She laid it down.

"For I would have you note, Mary Seton, that the nobles I trust, one and all betray or break down under me. I have found them wanting. It is each for himself and the devil

take the rest! But note how David Riccio is nothing in birth, yet to me and to Scotland he gives his best, and I have had much good of him—and this I note in others and in history. There is no charm in noble blood, though it is hard to believe—taught as I was that only the nobles are worth a thought. Yet I do not always find nobility noble."

"Nor I," said Mary Seton, deep in thought and memory. "The Prince shall know, but you shall teach him yourself, Your Grace. And for your dream?"

"You know I have taken the empty Church lands and made rents of them to pay the stipends of Knox's half-starved ministers and of my own clergy. Knox hates me for keeping the last alive forgetting that the Highlands are Catholic to a man, and he has no gratitude for the first. But it is done. And now my dream is to resume the Church lands that Moray and the nobles have stolen, and from the rents to maintain schools and hospitals for the poor and build up the country into decency until men talk no more of the savagery of Scotland. And this I will do for my child's sake too that he may have a better heritage than mine. Will they let me bear him in peace, Mary Seton? Will Elizabeth cease from plotting? A dog-mother could crawl away and have rest, one would think, then! Never in my life have I had a peaceful hour to make my dreams living things."

"Yet you dream, Madam, and that is well. I think you will be a great ruler." But her heart misgave her, remembering Darnley.

"They will not give me time," she said sadly, and so sat with bitter thoughts tormenting her. What a guard had she provided for her child if she should die in bearing him! The foolish dissolute Darnley, and through and behind him the crafty Elizabeth plotting in new directions as the old closed. But not a word to Mary Seton had she let fall of all such griefs as these, though they increased with the prospect of a child, for it strengthened Darnley's craving to be master and more. But now suddenly she broke down into a great weeping, and Mary Seton sprang to help, put her arms about her and drew her head to her bosom.

"Cry, my heart's heart!" she said tenderly. "It will ease you. You bear too much in silence. O it is a hard,

hard life for the dearest and best and kindest on earth! Sometimes I think if the witch of England could see your pale little face and great eyes they would melt even her rancour."

For a while she soothed her, stroking her hair and caressing her cheek with soft fingers, burning anxiety in her heart. What an evil preparation was all this cruel unceasing anxiety for childbirth! The Queen raised her streaming eyes at last to Mary Seton with woeful pallor upon cheeks and lips.

"There is more than you know, Mary Seton, and it may be you will yet have to aid me for the child's life and mine if it goes on. Therefore I tell you. The rebel Lords who did not take refuge with Elizabeth have drawn my husband, being young and foolish, into a plot with them, and Morton and Ruthven are for ever feeding him with tales of how David Riccio is the true king of Scotland being so deep in my counsels, and he himself nothing but a toy king. And he has taken such hatred to Riccio on this that I fear to lose my best adviser. To-day he said that there was no place for him in Scotland if the King hates him and joins with the rebels. And he spoke true. What shall I do? For he is all truth and astute as Solomon himself."

What indeed? Incredible madness—ruinous folly! That Darnley could turn to his wife's rebels! O, the curse, the curse, that she had ever seen him! Yet how reveal detestation of the fool that was dragging his Queen and child to wreckage! How to know how far that secret bond with Morton and Ruthven, two deadly-minded men, had dragged him? Useless to speak with the fool in his folly, but how to gain the knowledge that might save or spill? That was her thought.

"Dear Your Majesty!" she whispered. "How far has it gone? Can we know?"

"Nothing but what they tell us." The tone was one of exhaustion. "But, Mary Seton, if he kills my child with fear I will leave him. A wife might endure it, a mother cannot."

Mary Seton leaped at her words.

"Leave him, leave him before it is too late, my heart's beloved. Send him and his base old father back to Elizabeth. She asked for them. And be free and come with

me to Stirling, and there in the strong castle where they guarded you, a child, we will guard your Prince and you."

"A dream of heaven and as far out of reach!" the Queen said, collecting herself and drying her tears. "What would the world say and my own heart if I handed the Prince's father to Elizabeth and the block, and brought him into the world fatherless. Think better, Mary Seton."

True. They sat with clasped hands, trying each to draw strength from the other's love and courage. Riccio came in sallow and worn, with papers for the Queen, his eyes staring anxiously in his face.

"It is cold, cold!" he said shuddering; "I would I were in the sunshine of Italy." And Mary looked despairingly at Mary Seton when his back was turned.

Meanwhile Randolph was writing to Dudley, now Earl of Leicester, what if they could have read would have clotted the blood in their veins with horror.

> "I know now for certain that this Queen repents her marriage, that she hates him and his. And I know that there are plots in hand contrived by his father and Darnley to take the crown against her will. I know that David Riccio with the King's consent shall have his throat cut within ten days. Many things worse than this come to my ears, of things intended against her own person which I think better to keep secret."

If she had known Mary might have agreed with Randolph that the madness of her marriage was working out in the doom of relentless Furies. Fortunately the worst was not known to her. Who could live if the future was unrolled before them?

But that was not the whole. He might have added, what he would not put on paper, that he himself was art and part in the pact of murder. As honest Melville was to write later: "Cecil was director, and Randolph executor"—and Elizabeth still hard at work while Moray and others lay under her apparent displeasure. Darnley played into their hands, one and all. They throve on his madness of vanity which served their turn as no wisdom on earth could have done. They fooled him to the top of his bent and gloried

little witch that whispers tales at her ear—and three of the other false ladies to be drowned. But will Your Majesty have it before or after Bothwell's marriage with Lady Jean Gordon ? "

" I will have it after, that all may go down together ! " Darnley's face had recovered colour. The firm fixed sound of the plans gladdened him, and once begun is easy done with such a band behind one !

" But not a hand on the Queen—not a hand ! " he said sternly. " In prison in Lochleven Castle she will be harmless, and the child will be a pawn in our game."

" True. We need Your Majesty's head always ! " said the Postulate obsequiously—a remark which might have had more meanings than one. But the thought in his mind was one which might or might not have escaped Darnley's attention—that for a scene of wild bloodshed and horror to take place about a woman in her condition was a way as sure to end her and the child as any dagger. And so best, for it would open Moray's way straight to the throne. Besides, if in the scuffle the Queen got a thrust in the side——!

" It is but a fortnight to delay ! " added the Postulate, " and here comes Bothwell dreaming of his love, with his ugly one-eyed face and poisonous heart. Greet him pleasantly, Your Majesty. Keep in with our foes till we fall out for good and all."

They met Bothwell with a coarse jest on his marriage which he received in kind, but it would have been difficult indeed for the Postulate or Darnley to have fathomed the thoughts hidden deep under his one-eyed ugliness, and dull silence. He went his way ; they theirs.

The Queen was deep in preparation for his marriage those last days. She loved the Gordons, her cousins, and owed them a long score for Moray's persecution. Nothing was too much to do for Bothwell's Gordon bride. More than once he himself had angered her, but to her mother he had been staunch, and she more than half believed he would be the like to her in a day of need.

The rich stores of her wardrobe were brought out and displayed before the Queen and her Maries that she might choose her gift of a royal wedding gown for Lady Jean. Great waves of splendid velvets and brocades, stiff with

Venetian splendours of gold and cut velvet, were unrolled that she might see their rich bloom displayed to fullest advantage. She appraised and considered.

"No, with her pale gold hair and eyes blue as forget-me-nots we must not overwhelm her with colour. It must be silver. Silver, Jane Kennedy—of the best."

The woman of the bed-chamber unrolled a scroll of flowing silver, burnished to brilliance, black in the shadows, smooth and supple as finest satin. The ladies clapped their hands.

"Perfect. Exquisite. With a cobweb ruff dropped with pearls! Perfect for the sweet Gordon! Call her—call her!"

The bride came shyly in—overwhelmed with pleasure and honour; she whose family had for years crouched under the heavy hand of Moray. Her soft eyes worshipped the Queen, and as she knelt to kiss her hand Mary's eyes were motherly though they were both of the same age. Too delicate a flower, she thought, for Bothwell to carry off to his rough Border castle; too pale and clinging. What would he do with a girl like a lily in that harsh Debatable Land? A Catholic too—and he the stiffest of political Protestants that he might pull the strings of John Knox and the people of the Lowlands. Though she was Catholic he had refused to humour his bride by any intrusion of Romish rites. If she wanted him she must take him as he was—a staunch Reformer, a hater of idolatrous Mass.

She took him, and the banqueting and jousting at Holyrood were such as to heap the Gordon bride and grim earl with honour.

"But she should have had her rites!" thought the Queen sadly. "No marriage is marriage to me but such as neither God nor man can dissolve, come weal or woe."

The last untroubled festivities, the last free merriment that Mary Stuart was ever to hold at Holyrood! The sky was darkening—clouds banking up for the roar of thunder, the flash of barbed and deadly lightning. Afterwards, the thought stood out clear against black doubt in Mary Seton's mind that Bothwell had foreseen events which he would watch as a looker-on only, and so had set the date of his marriage.

But they were gone and the day drew near—that ninth

day of March to be long remembered in Scotland and England. Darnley had sulked apart from the Queen since the last meeting of Parliament. He loathed their joint sovereignty. He would reign alone and his wife kiss his hand in gratitude. He would not accompany her to the opening of Parliament unless he opened it himself and she sat by him silent ; and since it was impossible she should be thus deposed before her Estates, he took himself off with his boon-companions to Leith, and left her to steer her ship as best she could.

" He is neither to hold nor to bind—the fool—the fool ! " said Bothwell, mounting to ride from the Parliament House, and watching the heavy sadness on Mary's face as she returned in state and alone. It was days before the fool came back sullen, half stupefied with drink. But the ninth of March was come—and not gone. What would it take with it ?

Outside old Holyrood in the twilight men-at-arms assembled silently and without tuck of drum. Morton had slipped a goodly band of them inside the gates. They waited in stern readiness. A supper-party was held on a ground floor of the palace headed by Darnley. Lord Lindsay of the Byres, Mary's bitter enemy, sat at his right ; Ruthven, ghastly with his mortal disease upon him, at his left ; the Postulate or Bastard of Angus—a deadly four indeed, though Darnley flinched and stared behind him now and again as the time drew near and the fear took him.

Upstairs the Queen, unsuspecting, supped in her little cabinet with the Countess of Argyll, and Lord Robert Stuart, her illegitimate brother and sister, the Master of her Household, an equerry, her French doctor and one or two more—Riccio among them—in a gorgeous coat Titian might have painted, of black embossed velvet and sables, muffling his chilly bones against the cold.

They had been singing, and music strewed the side-table with Riccio's lute lying upon it, warm from his skilful hand—a quiet evening with such talk and song as formed a little harbour of refuge where her tired soul might rest an hour before its pinions were storm-beaten and rain-drenched again.

Now they ate and laughed. Riccio as not of high enough rank to sit at table with the Queen stood at the sideboard

eating a sweetmeat sent him by her favour. She leaned back resting her head against the purple velvet of her chair, weary with her condition but at rest.

Darnley entered alone.

She had not seen him for some days. He took the chair beside her, and she leaned over its side to kiss him as he put a false arm about her.

"My Lord, have you supped?"

"I thought you would have finished your supper by now, and——"

The words were interrupted. The arras hangings were thrust aside and Ruthven, white and gaunt in the face, with glaring eyes, stood by the secret door that led from Darnley's chamber, fixing them all in gasping silence. The Queen cried out—such a death's head stared on her from hollow eye-pits! Then she composed herself.

"My Lord, I was coming to visit you in your chamber, hearing you were suffering. Yet now I see you in armour. What does it mean?"

He dragged a chair towards him and dropped into it with a livid sneer.

"Ill I have been, but well enough to come here for your good."

So strange was his manner that it was as though the life of all was struck dumb and suspended, that they might see and hear what they knew was to come. Not an eye wavered from the two. They questioned and answered in a breathless silence like people in a play with an audience frozen into attention.

"What good can you do me? Your fashion is not that of a well-wisher?"

Her voice was steadying on an under-note of alarm but her heart fluttered wildly. She laid her hand on her side where the child trembled.

"There is no harm intended Your Grace nor anyone but yon poltroon David. It is he with whom I have to speak."

"What has he done?"

"Ask the King, your husband!"

She turned her face to Darnley who leaned on the back of her chair to steady himself. It had begun; his brain hammered! How in God's name would it end?

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked sternly.

With choking voice he answered ; Judas to his associates as to her. " I know nothing of the matter."

She turned lion-like on Ruthven.

" Leave my presence on pain of death. Go ! "

Keith and Erskine advanced upon him but he was on his feet, sword at the ready, shrieking like a woman.

" Lay no hand on me for I will not be handled," and as though his cry were a signal, the secret door belched its assassins into the midst of the frozen staring party and the scene was set for death's own entry.

" The meaning ? " cried Mary, on her feet, forgetting all else in a king's defiance to danger. " Do you seek my life?"

Unleashed now and ready for the spring Ruthven yelled in her face.

" No, Madam, but we will have out yonder villain," and so made at Riccio to run him through. He would have done it, and better for Riccio if he had and so ended torture—but the Queen flung herself between with a cry.

" If my secretary is guilty I will exhibit him before the Lords of Parliament that he may have justice."

" Here is our justice, Madam ! " shouted George the Postulate, the Bastard of Angus, flourishing a rope.

Instantly the whole gathering broke into passion and mad uproar. The woman, Janet of Argyll, screamed, threw up her hands and sank fainting in a chair. Mary Seton would have sprung to the Queen but a man thrust her back. Mary stood like a rock among the surging men while Riccio on his knees clung to her robe burying his face in it, mad with terror. No fighting man he, though true as steel to his bread and salt. She bent for a moment above him, panting.

" Have no fear. The King dares not suffer you to be slain in my presence."

Darnley clung to the chair blenching and shuddering as her words struck his brain. Had he been mad, was he waking to reason and honour ? The murderers saw that the man was useless ; Ruthven caught the Queen and thrust her into his arms.

" Sir, take the Queen your wife and Sovereign to you."

Yells and shouts arose outside in the palace, penetrated and guarded by the assassins, Morton's men advancing to attack the Queen. They forced the door of the presence chamber and the palace servants ran like hunted deer. They

flung into the Queen's bed-chamber with torches flaming. They flung over the dining-table violently upon Mary with all that was on it as they centred on their victim. Stunned for a moment with agony, she fell under the men's feet, and so would have been trampled to death if Ruthven had not thrust her again into Darnley's arms swearing that she was safe and her husband the doer of the whole, and at that word a cry burst from her stricken heart summing up the agony of another Passion.

"My traitor that came with a kiss!" as she flung him from her with loathing, then turned on the murderers and faced them alone: "Traitors, I will protect the man for he is true."

"Have out that gallant!" yelled Ruthven pointing with his sword to the shuddering little figure clinging frantically to her robe.

Darnley, the coward, baser than all, muttered in her ear: "Let him go, Madam, none will harm him."

A shriek broke from Riccio—clinging to her knees as she stood above him transfigured with noble rage, fearless and free.

"Save my life, Madam, save my life for God's dear sake!"

As she stooped to guard him, George the Postulate stabbed him over her shoulder. The bursting blood sprinkled her dress as the dagger stuck in his side. Darnley mad with fear dragged her to a chair and held her there with all his weight and strength, wife and child, in a horrible embrace as the tumult thickened. And still she struggled to rescue the victim they had dragged from her.

Andrew Kerr held a cocked pistol to her side. "You are a dead woman if you stir. Hold you still!" The cold butt chilled through her gown as he pulled the trigger and the pistol loyaller than he, hung fire. But selfless courage dashed all fear.

"Fire!" she cried. "Fire! If you respect not the royal child in my womb!"

Patrick Bellenden thrust with a dagger at her bosom, and Standen her page parried it with a dash of a lighted torch. And still she faced them lion-like as the curs raged round her.

Now, as they dragged Riccio through the bed-chamber he

clung to the Queen's bed with the grip of a maddened man, until one of the devils struck his hands with a clubbed gun. They stabbed each other in their dreadful haste of raining blows, and death-shriek after shriek broke from his lips.

Then and then only she relaxed her struggles turning to the One Merciful.

"My good David! My good and faithful servant! May God receive your soul! May God have mercy upon your agony!" praying in a passion of faith, sharing to the last in the long agony of his death.

A choking dying groan, and still she prayed and prayed with wrung hands until a long sobbing moan ended his torture. But not hers. The Postulate gripping Darnley's dagger from his belt drove it into the corpse, crying aloud: "The King's blow!" and left it sticking. With a cord they tied the feet and so dragged him down the stair and away, themselves dabbled with his blood and their own; and then fell a great silence.

Husband and wife were alone.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY had turned the key on them trusting the man no more than the woman. She sat mute, he babbled fool's protestations that no harm was intended. Lost in a dream of despair she did not hear him more than the weeping wind outside. An equerry stole in an hour later. That roused her.

"Is David in ward? And where?"

"Madam, it is useless to speak of David. He is dead."

And as he spoke Mary Seton followed, escaped from the men who had dragged her off, crying aloud as she ran and pointing to Darnley.

"Madam, I have seen the murdered man and his murderers, and they swear all was done by the King's order. The King!"

Mary turned on him then, awaking to his shame.

"Traitor and son of a traitor, this is my reward!" She would have said more but that nature at last broke under her and she swayed aside fainting. Mary Seton caught her, repelling Darnley with a back-thrust of her foot as to a dog. She dragged her into the bed-chamber as the murderers trooped in headed by ghastly Ruthven—the room still vibrating to the murdered man's cries, and those blood-stains wet on the floor that may be seen dark and dried this day. Recovering and staggering with weakness, Mary turned on her traitor.

"Why have you done this wickedness to me—me who took you from low estate and gave you all?"

He stuttered out his taught lesson.

"I have good reason, for since yonder fellow David came in credit with Your Majesty you neither regarded nor entertained nor trusted me. And when I came to your chamber you kept me little company unless David was a third."

And this and more, slandering her chastity, so that in the presence of the men who listened she cried aloud: "With such a man I will live no more as his wife, and if my child and I die of it I leave my revenge to my royal kindred in France and Spain."

Ruthven broke in with a jeer.

"These noble Princes are too great to meddle with a poor man like myself. And if you and your child die of it blame your husband and none of us. The more you mourn the worse you make your case!"

She laughed aloud—a dreadful laughter that scorched Mary Seton's tears.

"I trust that God who beholds it from the high heaven shall avenge my wrongs, and move the child which shall be born of me to root out you and your posterity."

Long years afterwards Mary Seton was to remember that laughter and Ruthven's answering jeer. For when he had gone to his account her son, James the Sixth of Scotland, burnt out that nest of traitors as she prophesied, and even then Mary Seton shuddered, remembering and seeing the doom of God.

A great clash and shouting without. Cries of "A Bothwell! A Huntley!"—the loyal Lords charging to the Queen's defence, rallying her servants. She would have flown to the window and called, but Ruthven and the rest threatened to cut her in collops, and fling her down to them. They thrust Mary Seton away, and they shouted to the rallying citizens that it was only the Queen and her husband making merry, and then, all hope gone, she fell into a state of delirium and was at their mercy. Doubtless they would have murdered her then and there but for the royal child they needed for their game when she and Darnley should be despatched and forgotten.

How she lived through it is still a world's wonder, but she lived.

Later, Moray and her rebels arrived in secret from England on Darnley's treacherous summons, and were brought to her chamber. They thought she would turn from them in wrath, but the loving heart that Moray had cheated so often still lived and throbbed. For the moment she remembered his treachery no more. Kindred blood cried in her, and she flung herself into his arms kissing his

hard cheek and knotting her arms about his neck. Surely he must pity and save her at long last!

"Brother, brother! If you had been here you would not have let them handle me so cruelly!"

Moved beyond his own comprehension nervous tears stood in Moray's eyes as she clung to him. Tears soon dried!

For the next day two things happened which made Darnley's blood run cold in his veins. His new friends trusted him no longer. And of that he had fearful evidence. If the Queen were a prisoner in Holyrood so also was he. Appalled lest she should lose her child and life together and leave him shelterless—loathed and distrusted in Scotland, compelled to face the men whose tempers he knew too well—he besought that Mary Seton and another lady should be admitted to tend her, and met a stern refusal from Ruthven and Morton for his pains.

"Let her take her chance like another woman. What is it to us?"

He turned to her, despairing for his own fortunes, and trembling before the awful recognition that he had cast in his lot with the men whose interest it would be to destroy him the moment they had done with her.

"Mary—*ma mie*." He was kneeling beside her, where she lay in what seemed a deep dream of grief and pain, for though her eyes were closed the nerves about her mouth and eyes quivered pitiably. "Listen to me. I have sinned but I have learnt my lesson. Advise me. Trust me, and we will beat them yet. Open your eyes. Hear me. Hear me."

She opened them, looking at him from dim depths of despair.

"Mary Seton."

Once more springing to his feet he sent a message to the Lords, demanding not only Mary Seton, but Jane Kennedy. Moray, reflecting on the world's opinion, after a few moments judged it desirable, provided they would swear to open no communications for their Queen with the outer world. Mary Seton swore with dropped lashes. She would have sworn allegiance to the devil if she could come at her heart's love no otherwise. In a few moments she was holding the Queen to her bosom as she lay, and waving Darnley

imperiously to the door, the loyal Jane Kennedy at her shoulder.

"Look up, my heart's heart and take courage for the Prince and his mother. I have good news for you—good! Mary Livingstone—ah, she does not forget you though she is Sempill's wife now—she has stolen your ciphers from Riccio's chamber. She ran when she heard the tumult—the brave girl!—and Jane Kennedy and I—we have them. Drink this wine, eat, and recover yourself that we may send out letters to those that love you! We will raise Scotland as you did before when all the world wondered! Up!"

Between them they fed her starved lips with morsels of bread dipped in wine until faint colour flowed into her wan cheeks, and later with stronger food, propping her, soothing, caressing, pitying, as the dreadful story broke from her lips. Mary Seton's brave arms were about her.

"For yourself you cannot fight but for the Prince you can do all. Now, you are strong. Lay your dear head on these high pillows while Jane Kennedy and I write in cipher to your trusty servants. See—you are revived, to flourish for ever and always!"

They wrote, supplying Riccio's place. Letters they issued to Bothwell and more; "Ride, ride with speed, with speed," and in dishes of food and mufflers and what not, smuggled them from the palace and sent them on their way. And as they wrote she strengthened her marvellous bright wits and courage, responding to the call of hope as a violin to the hand of the master-player.

"I am well!" she said, sitting up at last and looking them in the face. "God bless you, Mary Seton and you, Jane Kennedy. There is nothing I cannot do now. What must it be?"

"Escape, what else? I will tell you now that the rebel Lords voted this day on whether you should live or die, and the traitor Moray gave his vote for your death. Some would let you live until the Prince is born—some not. But we will outwit them, for your good days are at hand. This should spur you!"

Moray—whom she had kissed, whose eyes had moistened at her touch! He said they had gone too far to recede with safety. It was no time to dally. She sat a moment in

thought and bid them call the King—but on that the women hesitated and with reason.

"I am right, girls, right! He has had his lesson and seen their plot. I may shape him yet into a strength for the child. Call him! They have made a lover of Riccio, but who can say a word against my fair fame if he is with me? It will brand them liars."

With delaying feet Mary Seton went to the door, strong and true instinct warning her that once more the Queen was climbing on a broken bough, obeying the impulse of hope rather than brain. That was her fatal way.

She lived and moved on intuitions guided by her heart, feminine passionate intuitions driven by hope and desire. Because she loved Darnley he must be lovable, because it was life and death to her that he should be trustworthy there must be rock in him though hidden under clay. Elizabeth would have flung him to the rebel Lords and escaped to safety. Mary could not.

He came in shame-faced, disarrayed, a furtive eye on her to see what she would be at. He too had had news of the Lords, and knew by now that her death-warrant was his. At the look in her eyes he flung himself on his knees and wept with his face in her lap—wept like a child at its mother's feet.

"I have been mad. I have near wrecked our ship. Is there any forgiveness? Already I have told you I repented, and you made no answer. Is there an answer now?"

As for Mary Seton she could have dashed her fist in the foolish face she hated. Madness of love—blinded eyes that could not see falsity and weakness written on every line of it! Hers was the better counsel. Better instant parting than any paltering with weakness masquerading as penitence. But Mary had loved him. She had not.

"If you have learnt that disunion between us is ruin—Riccio would have given his blood for that and thought it well spent. But first appeal to God in penitence and prayer for a foul murder and more—O much, much more! And that done you have my forgiveness. Even the bitterest fault of all when you cast shame on my name and the fatherhood of my child. Surely devils drove you!"

He sobbed at her knees with Mary Seton's fixed face of scorn above him. But Mary Stuart did not see her curled

lips as she listened with hope to his protestations. They plotted an almost hopeless escape and there the Seton aided.

Word was sent to the Lords that she was too weakened with shock and terror to see them—rest she must have or die.

" She can scarcely stand for weakness. It is thought she may miscarry. And I, the King will be answerable for her safe-keeping."

Ruthven sent for answer: " If in this you mislead us whatever bloodshed and mischief comes of it be on your head and your children's ! "

" They trust all to the Queen's weakness of body—that she can stir nowhere beyond her chamber door," was Mary Seton's shrewd comment; adding in a whisper to Jane Kennedy: " They little know her," and turned again to her preparations.

Night fell over Holyrood, the long March night, helpful for secret deeds. The attendants were summoned for their supper, Mary lying on her day-bed helpless and attended by Mary Seton, while the King ate with appetite at a solitary table placed beside her. Looks of pity were cast upon her as the men went to and fro serving him, for not one in the household but loved her and their thought was: " She cannot live. What woman could see such sights and endure to face her childbirth. It cannot be."

Supper done, her women supported her with Darnley's help and laid her in the great velvet bed—drawing the curtains back that the lesser women of the service might see and spread the sorrowful story of the Queen's danger.

Later, attended by his gentlemen, Darnley went to his own bed, yawning, irritable as a man thwarted, crossed and exposed to contempt by the powerful Lords who held the Queen, Kingdom and himself in their grip. All in Holyrood slept, wearied, fordone with the scenes and terrors of the past two days, and many a prayer went up for the Queen in her dark hour. Who could guess that when midnight was heavy over Edinburgh the streets empty, no star shining, a light foot stole into Mary's room—a light hand warned her, and she rose fully dressed to find Darnley at the door—he only ? Who would believe that the three crept like mice down the secret stair, unlit. feeling their way step

by step to a little postern door that Mary Seton knew and Darnley had used for issue on his secret pleasures ?

A horse at the door, his fleetest, with his equerry to hold it. A little group of horses in deepest shadow of the walls. Erskine, the Queen's equerry, well mounted, and behind the saddle a pillion for a woman's use. Behind him Traquair, Captain of the Guard, with another.

Were Moray, Morton and Ruthven troubled with evil dreams and gliding fears as Darnley lifted the Queen to the pillion and Traquair took Mary Seton behind him ?—as Darnley sprang to his saddle and Standen and Bastian behind ? Not swiftly must they ride as yet, lest some should look out of windows at the clatter of hoofs and rend the night with shouts of warning.

From the precincts of Holyrood they paced, Erskine trembling with loyal fear as the Queen's arms clasped him, yet tense as steel. Could she bear it after all she had endured ?

She guessed his thought and whispered: "Ride—ride for freedom. Death or freedom !"

And he set his teeth and restrained the great horse till he could let him go.

Once safe from the streets they rode like the rushing wind, galloping, Mary clinging to Erskine for life. But he heard her laugh in his ear and knew all was well.

For Seton House first, the loyal House, the loyal Setons ! There she might rest but could not stay. What matter ? Lord Seton waited with two hundred armed men to escort them to Dunbar. It would be a bold man who would snatch the rose from that stem with swords for thorns.

"Lift me down," she cried, when she saw them. "The sight of the Setons is medicine for mind and body. Bring me a horse ! I need no support. I will ride with Lord Seton beside me to Dunbar."

Judge if Mary Seton flamed with pride—if she took her own horse and laughed aloud at the notion of a pillion. If Lord Seton rode at the Queen's right hand she would ride on the left as a Seton should. Let Darnley ride where he would—that was her post when the Setons were out with swords and their own war-cry "Set on for Seton."

They might shout as they would now with their Sovereign Lady in the midst, sweeping on gallantly to the stronghold

of Dunbar. The exquisite joy of freedom woke like a sunburst and warmed her body and soul. Out rang the shout: "The Queen!" as the company swept up to the portcullis and raised drawbridge, and sleepy heads appeared along the walls.

"The Queen!" and the twenty miles' ride done! Over the drawbridge the horses clattered. Within, the castellan bowed to the ground, marvelling how on earth he should feed his royalties and the hungry Setons; overhead, dawn blazed in cold fire on the towers.

She dismounted with only a helping hand, her face glowing with the March chill.

"A fire, a fire to warm us, and eggs for our breakfast, my lord. I ask no more but I ask that—and plenty of them!"

So she cried, laughing for joy and freedom and her gallant ride—and they lit the fire and brought eggs, and with her own hands she set them on to cook, and they ate and were satisfied, and never were such eggs nor such a breakfast nor such a Queen's cooking!

Scarcely was it eaten when the thunder of horses' hoofs and the shouting of men drew them to the ramparts, and there a noble sight for royal eyes! Bothwell and Huntley galloping at the head of thirteen hundred horsemen for a brief and military counsel—To arms for the Queen and Scotland!

"And the King!" put in Darnley fretfully from his seat beside the Queen. But they were too eager. Nobody marked him. They knew that was no cry to rouse Highlands and Lowlands and unite them from North to South. He sat frowning and biting his nails while Mary and Mary Seton, with Bothwell, Huntley, and Seton—more apt at sword-play than pen—wrote letters, proclamations, summonses to arms. Swords about the Crown, horsemen speeding to every quarter! A great day—a day to be remembered when the flame of life burnt low choked with ashes.

She laughed aloud when it was done, thrusting the papers from her hands and stretching them above her head for relief.

"I would give my last jewel to have seen my traitors' faces when they found the bird flown, and Elizabeth's when the news reaches her! Yesterday I signed myself: 'A Queen without a Kingdom' to my French kin. To-day:

'Queen of the bravest, loyallest country in the wide world.' O the joy of freedom! What shall I give to those who have given it to me—my Seton, Bothwell, Huntley?"

She turned a beaming face on all, raining love and thanks and joy. For the moment she remembered no more the anguish—only freedom, and that she carried the hope of Scotland in herself and her child.

Darnley muttered jealously behind her: "*I* gave you freedom. Without me—your husband that you forget so easily—there was no escape for you from the Lords and death. And now I am nothing!"

Mary Seton heard him and her lip drew in sharply. O to be rid of the incubus! To pack him back to England to sink or swim with Elizabeth. O that it had never been done! A girl's foolish passion to wreck so royal a life and doom it to ruin and shame! At that moment of joy and hope breaking upon them like swelling waves, she could with her own hand have stabbed him to the heart, and have given her mistress a truer freedom than that of the moors and mountains. "But it will come. Somehow some day his own treacheries will rise upon him in blood!" her heart said as she bent above the letters and hid her angry face.

Men came pouring in. Mary had eight thousand men about her before the proclamations were issued. The story of Riccio was roaring through Scotland like flame, and men loathed the dastards who had so used a woman and their Queen.

But the consternation, the dumb dismay that broke into frantic violence of speech, when the Lords entered Holyrood to take their prisoner and found the nest warm but the bird free in blue air! Darnley!—the liar —the traitor to his bond! Her flight with him had saved not only her crown but her reputation, for how impugn a woman for faithlessness to her husband when that husband had fled with her to safety from their lies and daggers? And what did Darnley know of their schemes that he would not now publish to the world?

"May God do so unto me and more also," said Moray between clenched teeth, "if I do not wring the last drop of blood from Darnley's heart for this devil's work."

"But now—now! What now!" That was the cry of the others huddling round Moray—their brain and counsel.

"Flight! Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost as he surely will. But we shall come back. Darnley will sink her yet and his fool's follies drive her into my arms, for she has nowhere else to turn, and a woman with child is easy game in body and mind."

"She has not so shown herself!" said Ruthven ghastly of face. "God knows the fright should have killed her, let alone the escape! But flight, flight! Waste no words!"

They scattered, riding for life as Mary had done for freedom. Morton, Ruthven, Lindsay, Kerr and the Postulate—over the Border to England—to Newcastle. Lethington and John Knox to the wilds of the country, there to shelter. Scotland still loved its Queen.

But they could turn the knife in her heart in more ways than one. If Darnley was to reveal their secrets they could be beforehand with him and reveal his. Morton wrote folios to the Queen—folios of humility and venom mingled. He was a sinner—yes—he owned it at her feet, but he had been seduced from his allegiance by Darnley and his father Lennox. These were her traitors. It was her husband and his father who had doomed her and her child to death—either by the terror of the assassination or later by imprisonment and murder. Mary had thought she knew their windings, but as plot after plot unfolded in viperous life before her the blood rushed to her face for wrath and shame that such men could live, or she have soiled her hands with them and their baseness.

"Send for my Lord Darnley and stay that you may hear my words to him," she said, paling again as the blood flowed to her heart to steady it. Like her cousin Elizabeth she whitened always into resolution. Mary Seton could have shouted for joy to see it. Pack them back to Elizabeth and let them go and a good riddance of vilest rubbish! The axe and the block for both!

There was that in the air of both women that preluded a storm as Darnley walked in with bravado.

"Early to work this morning, Madam, and I am no secretary. My sword is yours, but my pen I cannot promise."

She passed it by, striking her hand upon the papers.

"Letters are brought me post from Morton. Letters in which he gives chapter and verse for your doings and your

base father's. Noble blood !—churl's blood, gallows' blood, is in your veins that you could so lie and deceive and brutalize yourselves to me and my people ! But know this : you I must keep for my curse, and reminder of folly that death will not wipe out. Him I disown."

She stopped, breathless with passion. On Darnley the storm had broken so suddenly that for a moment it stunned him. Mary Seton could watch the weak false mind doubling this way and that to shelter, and finding all its earths stopped.

"You gave me your forgiveness and amnesty for past offences," he stuttered at length.

But she interrupted : "For those I knew. I know more now. For these—the waters of the ocean could not wash out."

"Send that woman away. I must speak with you alone." He motioned to Mary Seton where she stood fixing him with bitter looks of scorn.

"She shall not go. She is true as truth. Speak if you will or be silent. I care neither way. Who can trust a word you utter ? "

But on that small encouragement he spoke. Wild invectives against Morton and the Lords. Wild pleas for pity and forgiveness, wild wrath that the father of the King of Scotland (her lip curled at that) should be exposed to discourtesy and shame.

"Go on," was all she vouchsafed. "I will hear and you shall have my mind. But be brief, for I have more to think of than your child's folly."

Child. He caught at the word, turning it his own way. Weak triumph glittered in his eyes.

"Ah, there is that too. My blood that you despise is our child's. Divorce us you cannot. No—not in life or death. My blood in him and his to the end of time."

Could the child ever forgive her for the father she had given him ? In that moment she realized how inevitable is the harvest reaped from man's own sowing, how the deed carries its punishment in it as the apple its pips which will be trees. She collected herself into stern calm—the sternness as much for herself as for the poor fool before her.

"You are right there. I must bear with you, for you are the fruit of my own deed as the child is its fruit. I will

give you what honour you leave yourself. But in private I take no counsel from you. That is ended. And tell your father to flee for his life. I will see his face no more."

He slunk from the room muttering. She turned to Mary Seton.

"Was it well done?"

"Well. But not enough, Mary Stuart. You should not have talked, but cast the bosom-snake out. Will you have the child know such a father?"

"God may be good to us!" she answered sighing.

Next she re-shaped her ministry, including Huntley and Bothwell. She stripped her traitors of the rich lands she had heaped upon them. Darnley rained in revelations upon her that fixed their punishment in the withdrawal of these ill-got riches. But at last she bid him hold his tongue for policy's sake if no more, "For some I must keep," she said, "to please a certain part of my people. Therefore I will close my eyes where I can and hope for future service."

"Not Moray—not Moray!" he pleaded. "That man is poison to the heart's core and Satan-faced and hearted. Forgive all others if you must, but make him shorter by a head for he is the mickle devil himself."

"That is mine to me!" she answered briefly. "He is my blood—not yours."

For indeed she believed that Darnley the twice-turned traitor could not speak truth if he tried, and Moray might be better than he allowed him. At least he had not murdered Riccio. How could she give up the hope of winning him? Who else had she in her utter loneliness? He had at least counselled her against Darnley. And he wrote almost frantic letters imploring pardon. He had sinned in some small respects, he said, but of Riccio's murder he knew nothing. In that he was white before God. He disowned with scorn the brutes who had committed the "late odious crime." With such men he never could or would associate. Far be it from him. Meanwhile he was privately recommending the English refugees to Elizabeth's good graces as his "dear friends." The man could not be honest even if it had been his interest, as it was not.

Yet because Mary longed to believe him she found it possible to do so after her fashion. She too had her weakness. Knowing Darnley a liar and weakling, she argued

woman-like that in the man who scorned him must be safety and truth, if only she could win him and convince him of her own love and trust. Darnley wrecked her there as everywhere.

She signed Moray's pardon—the moth flitting to the flame once too often, and Darnley, sullen, fierce and jealous, muttered only: "As she has brewed so let her drink," little realizing how that bitter cup was to be held to his lips also—and how soon. But she did all that was possible to hide the shame of her child's father. She proclaimed his innocence. He was permitted to declare that he was free of all guilt "in the late treason and slaughter committed in the Abbey of Holyrood." On penalty of treason all were forbidden to charge him with it, and over him she threw the strong shield of her own popularity. No wife, however passionately devoted, could do more, but in her own heart she knew that some bond was broken never to be knit, and that henceforth effort, not impulse, would hold them together.

Thus, with her foes at her feet and Darnley for the moment leashed, she set out to Edinburgh Castle to await her childbirth and what God might send her.

CHAPTER XIV

BUT she believed that if there was life left for the child in the struggle there would be none for her. Always, when she most needed calm, some new surging emotion swept over her and stranded a woman weary to death of the tossing seas, unable either to sink into the great tranquillities of death or to endure the loud tumults of life.

Now, secluded in her chamber, awaiting her hour of travail, she made all preparation for the end if so it should fall. For that she could not grieve. Refuge from Darnley, from the grinding doubt of Moray, from myriad griefs, in some dim golden heaven where prayers and incense ascending continually before divine and pitying faces blot out the memory of a very troublous world. Who could mourn for that?

> "He hates him
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
> Stretch him out longer."

She spent hours in dreaming of it—rest, rest! In the intervals she wrote her will as to her jewels and remembrances for her friends. And that is in part worth recording, for if a man's will shows his nature in grain so certainly did hers. It gave her food for thoughts of mingled melancholy and pleasure. Dead days in France rose before her—bringing the friends who had cherished her orphaned childhood—the loyal hearts and true divided from her now by a deeper sea than leagues of cold grey waters.

But with death between them she would not forget Darnley. The world should not mock and say he was past forgiveness. To him she left a ring. "It is that with which I was espoused." That might recall days of hope—broken at the stem but immortal in the root, for who can tell God's

ways with man? To Lennox, his father—but she hovered long in writing that name—how could it be possible to recognize that base nature as human and allied to her? Yet again the chill purity shed from the wings of death killed even just anger, and she wrote against it a ring. To Bothwell, in memory of trusty services, two mourning rings of diamonds set in black. Yet would a man so rough and coarse of grain value them? No matter! Let it stand. At least she could show her kindness to his wife—that bonny Jean Gordon whom she had decked for her wedding. There she could be generous with justice, for to that house she owed much reparation. After Jean Bothwell's name she wrote some things of her best. A rich coif embroidered with rubies, pearls, and garnets, a noble collar of the same, and wide splendid sleeves wrought sumptuously with pearls, rubies and garnets. A set a queen might wear. That would please Bothwell also. But none were forgotten.

A message from Elizabeth wishing her short pain and a happy hour fell into her dream of peace like something unreal and distant. Elizabeth could not wish her any good. What matter? The world was receding, its voice dimming to far—far distance—drifting out to sea—the forces of life relinquishing her gently to the great outward-ebbing currents of eternity—that was her dream. Sometimes she forgot even the duel. But the day came when she was rent with pain ghastly and soul-dividing. Agonies of motherhood rending a wearied body from all but the consciousness of torture. Death not in a drifting peace as she had imagined, but in torment. For hours her life hung in the balance, and Moray hoped and Darnley feared, and Edinburgh was crowded with waiting nobles, for weighed in the balance with her life were civil war between Darnley and Moray and the Lords, and blood and tears and endless lamentation. And on her battle with death depended all.

They waited.

Suddenly a roaring thunder of guns from the ancient castle brooding on its hill over Edinburgh, and all work—all play—stopped to hear. A Prince, and the mother still living. The last of her gifts to her people. Civil war spread its wings and fled bat-like to the darkness of night. There lay on her scarcely beating bosom the true—the rightful heir.

That evening Darnley, now as he hoped, truly a King, was brought to see his wife and child. She lay on her pillows white as a lily in snow, chilly and quiet. No emotion moved her face or her voice. She spoke as from the other side of the river of death, holding the child and looking upward with mournful eyes while all stood silent to hear what she would say.

"My Lord, God has given you and me a son whose fatherhood is of none but you."

Silence, all staring on Darnley's confusion. For him it was a terrible moment, remembering his evil slanders. She lifted her arms weakly with their little burden and offered it to him.

"My Lord, here I protest to God and as I shall answer to Him at the Great Day of Judgment this is your son and no other man's son: and I am desirous that all here, ladies and others, bear witness. For he is so much your own son that I fear it may be the worse for him hereafter."

His face flushed a deep scarlet. The little helplessness of the child brought at last some realization of his crime on the night of that foul murder, when Mary had fought for her life and another's with a Queen's courage and a saint's endurance. A murmur of sympathy deep and menacing ran through the room. Sympathy with this mother could only mean menace to this father. He stooped and kissed the child awkwardly, replacing him in her arms.

She laid him in her bosom and addressed the equerry Standen.

"This the Prince who I hope shall first unite the realms of England and Scotland."

Standen looked down in astonishment.

"Why, Madam? Shall he succeed before Your Majesty and his father?"

She answered slowly: "Alas, his father has broken to me!"

In the grave silence of all present Darnley was compelled to most unwilling words.

"Sweet Madam, is this your promise that you made to forgive and forget all?"

She flashed at him at last: "I have forgiven all but never can forget. What if Kerr's pistol had shot? What

would have become of him and me? Only God knows, but we may suspect."

"Madam, Madam, these things are all past!"

She relaxed on her pillows with a sigh.

"Then let them go," and closed her eyes in exhaustion.

For Scotland it was the greatest of her triumphs, an undisputed succession and one which should unite England and Scotland, and end the age-long quarrel. Edinburgh shouted herself hoarse, garlanded herself with June roses, deafened herself with salvos of artillery, crowded herself into her ancient church of St. Giles with lords and commoners and all honest folk, and on her myriad knees thanked God for the new-born hope.

The Kirk Assembly—Reformers though they were—sent their Proctor to lay their joy at the Queen's feet and she, placing the child in his arms, listened with worship while he prayed for all Protestant blessings on his head. Left to herself she could sway even the Reformers to her own tolerance for each man's faith. Of her own motion she might have been as great a Queen as she was a sweet woman. It was the Lords who thwarted her always.

Lying in her dream of peace, she wondered faintly what difference the great birth would make between herself and Elizabeth. It must surely alter their relations entirely for better or worse. She had sent her true Sir James Melville to bear the news, and he, partly urged by triumph, partly by the sense of what Elizabeth would consider her due, made such speed to London as never was known. Let him tell his own story of that strange encounter with English Majesty.

"The fourth day I was in London and met with my brother who advertised Secretary Cecil of the birth of the Prince, desiring him to keep it hid until my being at Court to show it myself unto Her Majesty, who was for the time at Greenwich where she was in great merriment and dancing after supper. But so soon as Secretary Cecil sounded the news of the Prince's birth in her ear, all merriness was laid aside for that night, every one that was present marvelling what might move so sudden a change, for the Queen sat her down with her hand upon her temples, bursting out to some of her ladies how the Queen of Scotland was the mother of a fair son and she but a barren stock."

He went down next morning by boat to Greenwich expecting an unpleasant interview, but was met by some friends in great merriment.

"Go with a light heart, Sir James. Her Majesty has got counsel from Secretary Cecil to behave herself and put a good face on it—to swallow the pill with sugar, therefore you shall have a great reception of it, unlike her temper last night."

He put devout hands up to Heaven, for Elizabeth's temper was at once a jest and terror to all the Scots envoys, and so went on his way to the palace where little Mr. Secretary Cecil met him, beaming with joy and wearing a new doublet of puce satin slashed with silver in honour of the great occasion.

"And never shall you see greater joy, Sir James, than that which our Sovereign Lady has exprest in lively sort at your good news. She has prepared a jewel for the Queen, your Mistress—but I say no more. Yourself shall judge her by her deeds, and it is marvellous the love and thankfulness that flow from her lips."

Sir James wagged his head with the solemnity suitable on such news.

"And who but a sister-Queen can rejoice with my own Sovereign Lady at the fulfilment of her heart's desire, and the birth of an heir to the two kingdoms with peace between all for his christening gift and——"

"The view from this window is judged one of the finest in England with the deer beneath the trees!" said Cecil adroitly. "And as I was saying—Long live the Prince! Come this way, Sir James. This way!"

When they entered, Melville's eyes were dazzled indeed. Elizabeth's dress—or rather panoply—was always a State harness rather than human clothing, and she blazed sumptuously in cloth of gold distended over a vast farthingale which shortened her to a pack-of-cards Queen. It was sewn with spangles and diamonds in devices of a whole zoology of animals and reptiles, peacocks for her beauty, doves for her mercy, and serpents—not for their poison but their wisdom. Four necklaces, each with an appropriate pendant, decorated her bosom, the last nearing her knees. A horseshoe-shaped tire of gold illuminated her golden wig, with points turned upward, and adorned at the utmost

height with a small crown-royal blazing with diamonds. She extended a white hand, the fingers stiff with jewels, and as he knelt to kiss it honoured him with an astonishing leap into the air to testify alike to her youth and joy.

"God's death, man, but I am rejoiced with the news from Scotland! I tell you this for truth. It has recovered me from a heavy sickness that held me for fifteen days, and was better to me than any medicine! So that I have reason to thank you for your diligence. Give me your letter of credence and then tell me how does the Queen my sister and the child?"

He waited with deep respect until she had read it, and still on his knees he spoke: "I might well use diligence, Madam, so did my Queen hasten me to Your Majesty with the news, whom she knew would be gladdest of all her friends at her birth. But, alas, Your Majesty, it was dear bought with peril of her life and such pangs that she wished herself never married. Such perils do all women endure from the highest to the lowest."

The astute diplomatist sighed to the heels of his strongly perfumed boots—perfumed because Elizabeth detested the smell of leather.

"I will give her a fright of marriage and scare her from venturing on such perils. A good deed done! I will laugh with my Queen over it," was his wily thought as he knelt with bowed head. She bid him stand and give her the news, which done in painful detail, he requested her again on bended knee to stand godmother to the royal child.

"Ay that I will, with a heart and a half, Sir James, and the christening gift shall be worthy of him and me. O, the glad day! My sister's loving letter is a sight for sore eyes! God grant her a swift recovery with joy for her physician."

Melville considered a moment. Not for nothing had the Prince's birth reverberated through England. There it thrilled from North to South, and Protestant Englishmen put on their thinking-caps and pondered. If that child sprung of royal Scots and English blood had what they considered a decent upbringing, free from the Mass and French and Spanish influence, why then—he and unanswerable events might convert his lovely mother, and when Elizabeth slept with her ancestors England might rejoice in a Protestant Queen as sweet-natured as beautiful, and with a

hopeful heir to succeed her in his turn. Judge also of the joy of English Catholics! Here was a glorious bud on the ancient tree of the Faith—child of a mother who had declared like a saint that she would market her religion for no earthly crown. Such a Queen and such a son on the English throne, and France and Spain would be wooed to union and alliance with England, and the old Faith dominate Christendom! No wonder England throbbed to the news.

It was the stronger because Elizabeth had had a sharp attack of small-pox lately, and at the news the thoughts of Englishmen of all parties had turned to Scotland, for should it sweep her from the stage it was Mary or civil war for the English throne. She had recovered well, and her chief anxiety now lay in despatching couriers to Mary with earnest pleas for the complexion washes which had preserved the white-rose petal of her skin unblemished in a like danger. Men and horses were speeding between Edinburgh and London with these prayers and Mary's prescriptions from her skilled French physicians. But the errand might have been a far different one. These thoughts flashed through Melville's mind together with the eager English faces which had welcomed him in Berwick and along his road. Yes, he would venture.

"And, Madam, I humbly suspect that your christening gift is the declaration of my Queen as your heir in the face of all men, and what better than settle it so with such a mother and such a hopeful child?"

If he hoped to take her unawares he was mistaken. She too was an old hawk at the game and her broad smile might either have been geniality or pleasure in his discomfiture.

"Well said, trusty Sir James. It was partly in my own thought though the gift shall be apart from that. This great birth gives me another urgent reason that I should put my lawyers on searching the rightful claims to the crown of England, that I may come to a proper understanding as to whose is the best right. Rest assured! And now tell me—what exercises does your Queen use to preserve her shape? They say she is graceful."

He hesitated. This was verging towards the delicate ground of Elizabeth's mad jealousy, and diplomacy itself trod as if on eggs when that subject came uppermost.

"Riding, Madam, the chief. Not pacing through the town on a palfrey draped like a window with curtains, but galloping as if for her life, hawking, hunting, leaping! Her Majesty is lissom as a man. That, and shooting with arrows at the butts. But, thanks be to God, Your Majesty is so straight that other ladies have cause to ask what exercises Your Grace uses, and I would be glad to advise my Queen thereof."

"You shall hear, good Sir James. But I take such rough riding to be a danger for royal persons. Is there no more?"

"Why as to that, Madam, when my Queen has leisure from the State she studies much in good books such as histories and the like, and she will play also on the lute and virginal."

"And like a musician? With skill?"

Here again Melville must ponder the attitude of both ladies. But Mary would laugh with him, and see the humour, say what he would of her; Elizabeth never. He answered with a twinkle: "Reasonably well for a Queen!" consumed with inward laughter.

"Small praise!" said Elizabeth with a broad smile of pleasure. "Well, good Sir James, you shall hear *my* performance to-morrow and form your judgment on that!"

He was graced next day with a performance which threw him into ecstasies of courtly delight. "Such a hand! Such a touch! In this indeed my Queen is exceeded!" Might he kiss the fair instrument of his bliss, and so ventured a somewhat lingering kiss on the really lovely hand she instantly extended.

"And so you shall see me dance, Sir James, and say which excels, my sister or I!"

And forthwith dance she did, alone in a stately measure, and again with her cousin Lady Knollys and others of her ladies—Melville beating time softly with his hands to the music. She stopped, flushed and flattered.

"Your verdict, Sir Knight. Your verdict!"

For an instant Melville saw Mary in his mind's eye leading the dance at Holyrood in flowing robes, the transparent veil falling about her like clouds veiling the moon, the delicate beauty of her face framed in the transparence,

and ethereally lovely. She moved as much to some inner harmony as to outward expression, graceful as the queen-swan leading the fleet.

Elizabeth's farthingale bounced with the energy of her movements. She walked in stately fashion, but undulations were leaps with her in sharply beaten time. Melville smiled and prepared his compliment for the certain question.

It came: "And which dances the best? I or your Queen?"

"My Queen is a graceful dancer but does not dance so high and so disposedly as Your Majesty. No! By no means."

It took, and she smiled with satisfaction. Very shrewd were the eyes he kept upon Elizabeth and affairs in England, very certain his opinion that she was the deadly enemy, and that the early jealousy of the beauty and superior standing of the Queen of France and Queen of Scotland—now mother of a fair Prince—had grown into so strong a tree, that not even reasons of State and probably of vital policy to England could uproot it if even Elizabeth would. She would never acknowledge Mary as heir, nor the boy while Mary lived. She would fall back on one of the minor pretenders now under her thumb in England—cheating Mary with promises to the last and betraying her to death and shame with a kiss. It was not in her to do otherwise. Yet there was hope in England itself if Mary's tolerance was known there. Meanwhile, study always to win the English heart, keep well with the English Queen, distrust her every act and word, relying steadfastly on her sure hatred! Such was the summing up which Melville carried back to Mary, pressing it upon her that the English were no enemies, and might even be made staunch friends so long as she kept her head above water in Scotland.

That however was the problem. There was always Darnley. Melville returned into the heart of a storm, Mary Seton flashing a word of warning in the ante-room as he entered.

"Sir James, whatever news you bring from England there is ill news here. The Queen bid me prepare you. The King——"

"What news of him?"

She touched her lips with a finger, leading him to the corner where none could hear what passed.

"Moray is with Her Majesty, wild with wrath. Darnley came storming here from Leith swearing he distrusted Moray's very shadow, and that since Moray was head of one faction and Bothwell of the other, that he himself was held of no account and worse off than ever in his life. Therefore he would have Moray the Bastard slaughtered, and had chartered a ship at Leith that he might shake the Scots dust from his feet and so end his days in France. Would to God he had made good his word—if only he got rid of Moray first! Without the two of them God knows we should thrive!"

"What said the Queen?" asked Sir James, profoundly interested. That blessed consummation was too much to hope for in full, but yet, well managed, something might come of it——

"She cried out when he said it: 'Are you not content with Riccio's murder but you must dip your hands in my brother's blood that I love for my father's sake? And if he be false and disloyal have I not justice on my side to punish him by law instead of a bloody deed? Do not blacken your honour! I warn you I will warn Moray of his danger!'"

"And she did? O Lord how long! How long will she trust that base man compound of lies and avarice, and spill her sweet self to save him from what he has earned so richly!"

The touch of emotion moved Mary Seton to the very heart. She grasped Sir James by the hand in a feverish clasp, she, the resolute Mary Seton!

"I know not if I am fey but I have awful dreams. I dread to sleep. It is my heart's prayer that the fool may sail for France taking all men's scorn with him, for I have dreamed a dreary dream—I saw a dead man win a fight—and it was Darnley in his death destroying the Queen as in life he was never able. Sir James, speed him to France, and we will deal with Moray single-handed."

"It cannot be!" he answered with decision. "You are brainsick, Mistress Mary. That the Lords will slaughter Darnley is sure as I stand here. They talk of it openly in England, but our Queen will stand clear. She is pure and wholesome of life, and a man may read her thoughts in her

face. If they rid her of him she is well rid and no harm done. Let it go!"

Mary Seton still clutched him with probing eyes.

"Sir James, no. I dream of her far from Scotland and her own folk that love her. I dream—but I dare not tell."

"Dream no more and all shall be well!" he said patting her cheek good-humouredly. "She needs your strength not your fancies. And this is good news. We will force the fool to declare his grievances before the Council and so shame him."

So said, so done. Darnley retired into his sulks at Leith, and only emerged to face the Lords of the Council with his complaints and his reasons (which they demanded) for threatening to leave the Queen and Kingdom. She saw him first privately, and with tenderness asked an explanation, and being harshly refused desired he would speak his mind in the presence of the Lords of the Council and of the French Ambassador, Du Croc, his personal friend, entreating him to cite her fault and not to spare her.

If he had not been stone-blinded by vanity, drink and folly Darnley might have read his doom in the stern gravity of that circle of men, every one of whom he had mortally offended publicly and privately. Unwavering looks fixed his vacillating words and hesitations. Their words were humble for they would be repeated over Scotland; their matter was deadly wrath and scorn.

Would he condescend to understand that the motive of their coming was to inquire into the cause of his intended departure? Would he state his grievances? They should be remedied to their best ability, they said.

Silence.

Surely it must be something very serious which could induce him to leave so beautiful a Queen and so fair a realm?

Silence, obstinate and sullen.

"Can it be ourselves—the Lords of the Council—who have had the misfortune to offend? If so, we are prepared to submit in anything reasonable. As for Her Majesty it is impossible she should offend. On the contrary Your Majesty has every cause to praise God for having given you a wife so wise and virtuous as she has shown herself in every action."

The Frenchman du Croc, watching that singular scene wrote that night to Catherine dei Medicis :

> "The Queen then made a beautiful speech, and prayed him to declare in the presence of all if there were any occasion she had given him for flight. The Lords also. And I, for my part told him that I could not fail to give my testimony both as to what I had formerly seen and now saw. At last he declared he had had no cause given him for such a resolution."

Yet he rose and went like a churl without kissing her, saying only : " Adieu, Madam. You shall not see my face for a long time," and so took himself back to Leith in high dudgeon.

Sir James looked sadly at Mary's exhaustion as she lay back in her great arm-chair. Stung to the heart by rejected love it seemed to her that in casting her off before all he had dealt her the most shameful blow in all her miserable life with him. She had yet to learn what worse Fate had to deal her.

PART III

CHAPTER XV

EVEN in her own heart a dread of her twenty-fifth birthday was looming, for though it was still long distant, it would bring great dangers to her Crown. It was part of the law of Scotland that sovereigns might at twenty-five revoke any grants of land made by regents during their minority, or by themselves before that age—a measure of protection against royal youth and inexperience. Not only had Mary herself, cheated by Moray, been lavish on reaching Scotland, but regents during her long minority had been more so, that they might buy party support from insurgent nobles. This had reduced the revenue to one-third of its former value. Thus the Crown was poor and the nobles rich with ill-gotten gains, and the power of the Crown as nearly broken as it was possible to endure and survive. What could the nobles expect but that she must take advantage of this legal provision on reaching that fateful birthday? While on the other hand there was scarcely a Lord of either party who had not excellent reasons to desire another long minority and regency during which his broad acres would be secure. That consideration had saved her life until her son's birth. It hurled her now helpless to the wolves unless some most unforeseen way of escape should open. Men noted with secret fearful looks that Moray and Bothwell, the two heads of the great factions, were drawing together ominously, that the old foes Bothwell and Lethington were accepting arbitration for themselves also—Bothwell graciously relinquishing a part of the Lethington lands to his foe. Innocent men smiled and talked with pleasure of the peace-making birth of the heir. Men more astute drew apart and watched, for they knew Lethington subtle as hell—when had he ever forgiven?

Suppose he had a plot in that cruel narrow head of his for

a stroke that should destroy Bothwell and Darnley together? Men believed Mary's beauty and unblemished lovableness of character would guard her through any tumults. Men delighted also in her bright courage. Her exploits in hunting down her traitors had given her a mighty hold on the popular enthusiasm. "God bless that sweet face!" rang along every street as she passed with the smile which none could resist when its beam touched him. United nobles were strong, but they could not dare a united people as had been already proved, and the Queen was the nation's darling. She would worst the nobles yet, so said all.

She knew it, yet was sad at heart. Sick in body also. Riding to Jedburgh to administer justice to the borderers, and to visit Bothwell who lay at his castle of Hermitage—sorely wounded in an effort to arrest the head of the lawless Elliots—she took with her, her court, her ministers and law officers, and set forth in state to deal with offenders. But Darnley still held sullenly aloof at Glasgow where he could embark as well as from Leith if the fancy took him. His resolution was that she must crawl to his feet and accept all his whims if she wanted him back. He knew she was a woman who needed a man's support. But he forgot that he was teaching her to live alone, to act alone, and gradually to taste the relief of it, bitter at first but steadily growing sweeter. As yet she could not understand this nor her heart. She thought it a passing mood and sighed. Yet, she mentioned it to Bothwell, when with Moray and other nobles she rode to Hermitage to settle her Border business with him as Warden, and to condole with him on the wounds received in her service.

"The King goes from madness to madness!" she said mournfully. "Of you two who know him I ask—will he ever learn? Shall I ever have comfort of him?"

"That is as it shall please God, Madam!" said Bothwell gruffly with his one eye darting a warning glance at Moray by her shoulder. The sensuous element, strong and savage in the man, was stirred by her languid beauty as she leaned back in her chair, still delicately pale and transparent from childbirth—ill at ease in mind and body. No mate for a Hepburn like himself! Oddly that thought had never crossed his mind before even to meet denial from his common sense. Their relations had not been of that order on

his side any more than hers. They had always been hedged by dangers, distractions and anxieties and acrimonious discussions of State matters in their meetings at Holyrood and Stirling—neither love nor lust had room to spread a wing-feather or move a hoof. Now he saw her, a fair lady resting under the shelter of his roof-tree after a long ride, tasting his wine by his bedside, crumbling his cake—his guest. It struck a new chord and he turned uneasily in his bed, a silent coarse man whom any new experience bewildered.

"You suffer, my Lord?" she asked with gentle urgency, half rising as if to help him to move more easily, and Moray put his own hand out to shift the pillow.

"It is a twinge, Madam," he answered almost angrily, but the anger was not with her. "The Elliots thrust straight, but all will be well. Now as to those Elliots and the hunting of them?"

And so went on and put the folly by. But it haunted her visit, and when the time came for her to go and the others crowded about his bed to say good-bye, his lips were hot on the hand she tendered though she noted nothing. Her thoughts indeed were on the absence of Lady Bothwell, and on a bold brown face that peeped from a door as she passed the long corridor. A coarse jest of Moray's on the impudence of Bessie Crawford enlightened her as to the housekeeping at Hermitage Castle, even if the look of the girl's face had not half done so already. She held Moray's arm the closer as they went down the stone stair.

"He is a bad man in his life. I weep for my little Jean Gordon that we gave to so rough a hand though a brave one. What did he say, brother, when he called you back?"

Moray shot a sidelong look at her, unperceived in the dim light from narrow stone windows.

"He said: 'The Queen grows old from the troubles her fool brings on her! He will end her yet!'"

She answered bitterly: "He said true. I am not four and twenty and there are days when I am old—old in heart, though I have no wrinkles or grey hairs to show for it. He said true. And more?"

"More, sister. He said: 'Why not a divorce? Easy got, and the child there and she rid of the father. Sound her on

it with the Lords. They will favour it, I swear, for he wrecks the Kingdom with her.' Shall I sound the Lords, Madam?"

"No—no!" she said sharply with a pang that amazed herself. The father of her child—the husband her Catholic training taught her was flesh of her flesh till death did them part! That could not be. She dropped his arm as if the very touch of him angered her, though her head swam as she did it and she staggered till he put his arm about her waist and half carried her to her horse. He observed a strangeness in her manner and pallor. Her eyelids half covered her eyes, and her lips were apart as though she drew breath difficultly. Her hand was hot through her riding gauntlet.

Next day the long strain and daily dole of pain took their revenge on the body they had weakened, and death was at her throat with the spring of a wolf. It seemed to Mary Seton that all the woes of life broke upon her in an engulfing wave when she saw Mary Stuart depart into the great solitude of a sickness that is Death's Borderland. For the first time since they were children together Mary's constant love left her, careless of the fidelity that watched in anguish beside her, wandering through delirium more terrible to see than any pain.

She was in France again looking down on the water of Chenonceaux from the great window, with the dead Francis beside her, conscious that he was dead—yet living.

"You cannot be here, dear heart. You were buried with Mass and bell. Incense was a cloud about you and you vanished and I saw you no more. Why have you come back? I will go too. O the rest and silence of the grave! The incense and the great church and the quiet. I could wish to be dead. I could wish to be dead!"

Her voice would sink, then rise into a wild cry.

"Riccio. Riccio! He clings to my robe and I cannot move. My feet are weighted. Lift me, Almighty, lift me! I need help. It is Darnley that turns the dagger in his heart and mine. O my child, my little one—let us die in peace. Death is peace, but life is hell."

That passed, and like a drowning woman who floats to the surface of deep waters she recovered consciousness, and

still floating, as it were, with limbs relaxed and head thrown back and closed eyes, she bid them summon the Lords, and so declared her will as one who wishes the world farewell.

"May God of His mercy pardon my sins and grant me a penitent and contrite heart. May He deal with me in pity to my weakness, and be not extreme to mark what I have done amiss."

Moray kneeling at her head thought in his crooked soul: "Is this the end?" Yet, in spite of himself, felt his eyes wet, as when a touch of beauty or sorrow constricts the heart that will forget it quickly.

But she gathered voice and spoke: "I believe that a few hours will remove me from this world to a better, and though I have loved life dearly yet I find it no hard thing to accept death, acknowledging God as the Supreme Creator and Lord of all things, and I a little work of His hands—desiring His will to be accomplished in me."

Then, turning her mind earthward, she prayed for peace and unity among those who should rule the kingdom during her son's minority, and sent forgiveness to her husband who had never approached her even in this extremity, and to the banished Lords. Her child she committed to Elizabeth's keeping as to her nearest in blood, praying her nobles to guard the nobility of his soul. And summoning her fast failing strength for a last effort, she implored Moray to observe toleration in matters of religion as she herself had done, saying: "It is a sore thing and a sharp to anyone to have the conscience pressed in such a matter,"—as indeed few knew better than herself.

The men who had persecuted her knelt beside her. One laid his hands on hers a moment and wished his work undone. When her words reached him even Knox's iron heart was touched by the serenity of her resignation and patience. There was a spring of pure water somewhere deep in him which it set free, and hearing these things, he thought of her for the first time as a daughter to whom he had been unduly harsh, though most surely for her betterment! Therefore, words he spoke afterwards survive and speak for her and for himself also.

"I trust God of His infinite goodness through the prayers of many made for her at this present has preserved her to the

advancement of His glory and the comfort of the people committed to her care, whom I hope may be yet well governed for many years. My Lord Bothwell is here who convalesces well of his wound. I shall do diligence to collect the Queen's Grace's exhortations, and latter declarations of her will, that so godly and virtuous sayings may not perish."

Strange! Even his heart could vibrate to her touch when for a moment the clouds lifted and he saw her as she was.

Then again the fever took her with burning pains, and again the darkness obscured the light of her eyes. Very softly and swiftly she spoke, counting over her dead friends as one who longed to be with them.

"My mother, worn to death with the cares I thrust upon her, toiling alone, dying alone! My Francis—dead, dead! Chastelard smiling at the block. The block—oh cruel, cruel! Is Moray dead? Then how to rule the King alone——?" And so on, murmuring softly with scarcely a breath between, beginning again wearily, softly, unceasingly, a litany of pain. At last in utter exhaustion she sank into deep unconsciousness, deathly cold stealing upward to the feebly beating heart.

Nau, the skilled French physician, touched her pulse, raised her eyelids and drew back with dropped hands as a man who relinquishes the battle.

"It is done. This is death." He crossed himself and his lips moved.

The ladies in the room knelt weeping in the silence that greets that majestic approach. The beauty of her, the gentleness and sweet courage and trust that were passing, would darken the world for many. Lady Moray, bethinking herself, slipped slyly to the door to warn her husband to be in readiness, and those who knew her heart were glad to see her go.

Mary Beton uttered a cry: "She is dead." Did any pang for treachery never to be undone smite her with the cry? All knelt but Mary Seton. She sprang to the bed. She caught the hand of Nau the physician.

"She is not dead. She shall not die. To work!"

When men or women speak thus they are obeyed. The room was emptied, and Nau and she gave restoratives, used

warm unwearying friction, flexing her arms, knees and feet, sending the feeble life along the chilled veins with all the strength of their own love and resolution. It seemed to Mary Seton that she drove her own strong life and health vibrating through every nerve and fibre of the dying Queen. They did not weary; for three steady hours they worked desperately. And at last the lashes sealed on her cheek lifted and looked love at them, then sank again in rest which was not death but his brother sleep.

Later, the Lords stole in, the hardest touched by her weakness, some glad, some sorry.

It was only when the flame of life burnt more strongly in the frail lamp of her body that Darnley came to Jedburgh slowly and reluctantly, to the little grey fortress-like house (still surviving) where the Queen fought for her life—and his, if he had but known it. Yet even then she could not have rest. Taking himself off again, angry, insulted in his vanity because her state needed precaution, he wrote her letters so bitter that reading them she said low to herself, (but Mary Seton heard her): "Rather than live to endure such sorrow I would slay myself. It is more than my heart can bear."

"Thanks be to God and His Mother he is gone!" Mary Seton said in her heart. "The fool in his folly! Surely a man so worthless is not in the world elsewhere!"

The English had their first glimpse of her later when she was recovered, and what with the tales of her beauty and sovereignty they flocked like sheep to see her, huddling and crowding when she rode over the Bounds Road that divided England and Scotland. They polished the guns of Berwick-on-Tweed to assure themselves that they could speak with the Scots Queen if she showed her little teeth at them, but that was not in her heart—only friendship, and it might perhaps be curiosity and eagerness to show her power to charm. And English Sir John Foster rode forth with a gallant company of Englishmen to meet her in the Bounds Road and wish her well.

On they came with pennons flying, in armour of the best, burnished and glittering in winter sunshine—not a young man of them but wished to test his love of beauty and its worship by those most conquering eyes. Not a heart but throbbed as sitting her horse like a throne she

reined up to hear what they would say, and waved her hand to the salutes of England.

She wore a habit of dark green velvet, and with it a little hat embroidered all over with gold, and a gold band about it with a feather hung over one ear. Illness had left her lovelier than ever with clear, pale cheeks, lips faintly coral and large eyes shadowed in glooms of lashes. Indeed a face to win hearts and hold them, most sweetly womanly, her every glance and movement a prayer for heart's worship, or gentlest assumption of a right few could withhold. Du Croc, the kindly French ambassador, wrote of her at this time :

> " She is in the hands of her physician and I do assure you far from well. I believe the principal part of her disease to consist of deep grief and sorrow, nor does it seem possible to make her forget it. Still she repeats those words: ' I could wish to be dead.' "

Yet nothing is more heart-winning than melancholy shining through a rainbow smile. Those Englishmen saw her as a thing remote yet infinitely to be desired, if it were but her presence and the flying glance of her eyes, and rejoiced when she came—the English guns of Berwick-on-Tweed roaring welcome. They crowded to hear her voice as she spoke her silver words of courtesy.

" I am thus bold to presume upon my good sister's favour to enter into her bounds, not meaning any way to offend her or any subject of hers." That good sister would have liked it ill enough if she had seen the earnest eyes fixed upon the Queen who might one day be their Queen also, looks of pleasure and wonder running from one man to the other. A Queen of romance in some story written in gold and bordered with royal arabesques of amethyst, sapphire and ruby, beautiful as Guinevere or Iseult of the White Hands, in that *Morte d'Arthur* they knew well for its gallant tales of love and joust. They were the poorer when she went, waving her hand and smiling to hide the hurt she had had from the iron hoof of Sir John's rearing charger that had struck her on the knee.

So Queens should smile—a bright flame of beauty more mighty than sceptres—but horrible dangers were assemb-

ling black on the horizon. Her safety—such as it was—lay in the differences of the two great parties of the nobles, Moray's and Bothwell's. Bothwell she trusted, Moray she loved. Better if Bothwell could have deserved her love and Moray her trust, for never woman more needed men to stand by her than this. Bothwell rejected the English gold with which Moray filled bursting pockets, but the lures of ambition and power caught him like a bird in their toils, and what Elizabeth could not give him, Moray could.

He was now thirty-six, a rough hardy man tempered in the clashes of Border warfare, a shield and buckler to the throne if he were honest, a deadly danger if otherwise—and be sure if Mary knew this Moray knew it better. Set on Darnley's death, set on the Queen's ruin, he had learnt his lessons well.

"For, look you!" he said to Ruthven and Lindsay of the Byres in the strong council chamber at Craigmillar Castle. "My sister the Queen has bound the people yet more strongly to her by her courage and piety and the loss they would have in her had she died. Look back both of you—what could we ever do against her? And why? Because the people love her. A wise man reckons his foe's strength before he goes forth to warfare, and she has taught us hers."

Lindsay frowned, the harsh wrinkles turning his face to a mask of hate.

"For my part I see little in the face of any woman to turn any man from his purpose. But surely it is not to make another attempt and fail that you call us together. She has the whiphand of us with her sweet face and dainty ways. If we were painted puppets like Darnley we should have more chance."

"If you will follow counsel you will have the chance," Moray answered coolly, "not otherwise. The time is come that we must speak frankly among ourselves for it is life and death with us. Darnley must go——" He paused a moment and added: "Surely a wife so wronged must sooner or later not only wish him dead but compass his death, for there is no divorce for Catholics."

"You tried her?" Ruthven asked with knitted brows.

"We tried her—Bothwell would have it. Therefore, Huntley, Argyll, Lethington and I passed into her chamber

when she was enough recovered, and there recited the intolerable offences that Darnley had done her, more ungrateful than any brute beast, and so offered to make divorcement between her and her man. But she answered she would not, unless it were done lawfully and without hurt to her son. Otherwise, she would endure all torments and perils."

Lindsay shook his head, laughing as at pleasing news.

"If she were not herself a fool as women are, she would leap at the offer. And then?"

"She said: 'He may change. Let him go to France as he wills and there consider matters.' And presently, she looked up and said: 'You shall do nothing whereby my honour may be spotted and, therefore, let the matter lie as it is until God finds the remedy.' There she ended, and therefore, it is now needful that we should strike for her protection and ours."

"Protection!" said Lindsay meeting Moray's subtle calm with his own saturnine gravity. "Will Bothwell aid us to protect her?"

"He will aid. But the matter is deeper and more dangerous than can yet be conceived, and a bond for Darnley's death to which we all bind ourselves in brotherly fellowship and equal danger will be drawn and signed, so that together we stand or fall, however Her Grace may take it."

"And how will she take it?" Ruthven asked. He was still racked with the disease that ate at his vitals, and his face was ominous and ghastly in the twilight that fell through the arrow-slit of a window in the high stone chamber.

"That will be seen in due time," Moray answered. "Now know that Bothwell comes with the others of our faithful friends and brothers in two days from this. And note this in Bothwell. He is the bull who charges but not the dog who reasons; therefore speak to him of nothing but what is in the bond or he will wreck us all. It is truth indeed that each man of us must speak only by what is fixed between us, remembering that so long as the people believe that the Queen's Grace loves her man they will not bear a finger laid upon him. Therefore, every man-jack of us must spread it abroad that her heart is bitterly changed

towards him, and she takes him for the bane and curse of herself and her son. If she had taken a lover it would more easily fix belief."

Moray spoke gravely but Ruthven burst into a horse-laugh.

"There is Bothwell!" said he. "A fine lover to caper in a lady's chamber, with his one eye and his black nails and bull-neck! Or shall it be you, Lindsay, with your sweet temper and voice for a song?"

Lindsay turned a withering look on him.

"Let be with your jests and you so near your end! As to Bothwell—women are so light that an ape will command their love as well as a man. Look at Darnley! Bothwell is more of a man. What is your counsel, my Lord Moray?"

He was answered in the peculiar tone of sanctimonious religiosity which Moray used for his dealings with John Knox and his following.

"God forbid that any man should handle the Queen's Grace's name lightly, and I hope her liking for Bothwell is honest as becomes a married wife and a great Queen. More I cannot and will not say."

They observed the reserves in his tone and knew they would get no more at that time. But they got enough to set them thinking and doing, for before they left Craig-millar Castle with its deadly yews and grey sinister secrecy they had one and all of them—Bothwell also—signed their bond for Darnley's murder, as a person noxious to Queen and State, and so rode with hearts weighted with secrecy to the Prince's baptism.

"And she will have trouble there, God knows, enough to make her rejoice at our bond if she knew it, for the Queen of England is godmother, and she refuses to call the fool, King, and our Queen must needs please her, so it is a pretty rumple among them all."

But Mary grew lonelier and sadder. Mary Beton, weary of Randolph's absence in England and his silence on the essential point of marriage, bestowed her handsome face and false smiles on Alexander Ogilvie of Boyne, yet with her usual adroitness preserved her place about the Queen, though a married woman. Mary Fleming wedded the false Lethington, signer and mover of the bond for Darnley's destruction. The days were far gone when Mary and

her Maries had played as happy children in the sun-gilt garden at Inchmahome. Life was slowly and steadily unveiling her tragic countenance to them as lovers changed into cruel husbands, and harsh realities pressed upon them instead of the bright imaginings of youth. And the saddest of all was the Mary of Maries.

CHAPTER XVI

"COME to me. Send to me. The great sickness has overtaken me," was the cry of terror from Darnley's heart, when still sulking in his retreat at Glasgow he was attacked by the small-pox. Terrified for his life, terrified as a woman at the chance of losing his pink and white beauty, he sent messengers speeding to Mary at Stirling for the skilful physician Lusgerie whose prescriptions had saved her life and loveliness years before. When it reached her, she was sick and sorry, and Moray was at her ear with a lying tale that Darnley and his father were again concerned in a plot to imprison her, and set the little Prince on the throne with the prospect of a long regency for themselves. It was not true, but former experiences made it easy to believe and she knew at least that he spied on her for causes of offence. She wrote of that matter bitterly to her ambassador in Paris.

> "As for the King our husband, God knows always our conduct toward him; and his behaviour and thankfulness to us is also known to God and the world. Always we perceive him spying on our doings which, God willing, shall be such as none shall be offended with them or report of any way but honourably."

And then turning back to her burden she sent Lusgerie to him with a message that she would come to him when she was a little recovered. Mary Seton heard the promise with dismay, and knelt imploring her to run no more risks for a wretched ungrateful young man wholly unworthy of her.

"Sweet Madam, consider! I own the law of God forbids the parting of man and wife, yet surely when the kingdom, the Prince's life and your own are at stake, you

may well forbid him your presence. You have other duties than to wait on his whims. And I will tell you unsparing truth—were he to die under your hands or Lusgerie's the Lords will say you killed him. Madam, I know it! They are fair and smiling now, but deep and treacherous as the sea with all its wrecks hidden under a glitter of sunshine. I beseech you—I beseech you. Do not send Lusgerie!"

Mary laid a tender hand on the brown hair and wide perceptive forehead. To her Mary Seton's eyes were the most beautiful she had ever known for the clear spirit that looked out of them. The two women had drawn even nearer since the Queen's illness at Jedburgh, and now were never apart night or day. No word that Mary Seton uttered could fall lightly on the ear of Mary Stuart.

"Is anything known to you?" she asked at last, sighing. "There are few I can believe, but I believe you, my Mary."

"I know nothing, but I suspect all. Think, Madam! Can Moray know peace while the King lives? Can any of the Lords be deaf to his blustering threats of vengeance to leave them landless and headless? And Knox—can he forgive the King's boasts that the Mass shall be said in every kirk in Scotland? I dream at night—in the day I hear dreadful voices—and I know beyond proof that if the King dies they will rejoice and say it was the work of your physician or Your Majesty."

Mary shook her head.

"It is impossible that men should be so base! And think, Mary Seton, what would be said of me and rightly if I refused my presence or my physician to my husband—and he in sickness that may be mortal! No—we are in God's hand. The life He makes me lead is so strange that sometimes it would break my faith if I did not see beyond it."

"I cannot see," Mary Seton answered, laying her head on Mary Stuart's knee, and so remained for a moment silent with thoughts unutterable. It was true. The meshes of the net were falling softly but surely about the Queen. There was no action, no word of hers unattended by deadly danger, and she, trustful to madness because of her own truth and honour, walked along the way the traitors marked for her and kissed her Judas on the lips.

"Yet your prevision may be true, though I cannot tell from what side the blow is aimed. Listen here, Mary Seton—a letter from the Archbishop of Glasgow in Paris.

> "Madam, I am especially requested by the Spanish Ambassador to warn Your Grace to have care of yourself, for it is whispered some plot is in agitation to surprise you. He urges me to lose no time in hastening to you to warn you of your danger. Finally, I would beseech Your Majesty to cause the captains of your guard to be diligent in their office, for I cannot be out of fear until I hear your news."

She laid the letter down.

"I said it—I said it! There is a plot afoot and you shall not go. Maybe it is the King's plot to seize Your Grace. O Madam, stay!"

They were groping in the dark, though Mary Seton's bitter distrust of Moray set her near the truth. The Queen would not listen. She had the Stuart courage, and physical danger, if that were all, raised her spirit as when she galloped to Dunbar from Holyrood and left her enemies cursing behind her. She put the warning away from her and sent the physician and message.

Meanwhile the plot ripened steadily and with cunning. It was marvellous that even an outermost ripple should have reached Paris, so close they kept it. Bothwell was to be the hand to slay, the purpose of Moray and Morton holding firm that he should carry out the slaughter, while they hiding in darkness should reap the reward, and go further than Bothwell in his bull-headed brutality could guess. Moray's most deadly schemes were kept for Lethington and himself, and from Morton, Ruthven, Lindsay and the rest were hidden refinements to which they should be led gradually and skilfully. But Bothwell blundered ahead of all with desire for his guide. If the Queen were to be freed by Darnley's death they must find her a husband—some strong man to stand by her instead of the petulant whining boy they were murdering. She must have a man of the Reformed Faith, for that would widen the way to the crown of England. He must be capable of daunting Moray, and

trampling Morton, and holding Ruthven and Lindsay in check, and already Bothwell was confident and blustering in the tone he took with them in their fatal conferences at Whittinghame Castle. He knew their secrets, he could down them! As for Lethington, Mary Fleming's bridegroom, he was a man of peace to all intents and purposes and would be easy to handle by fear. So thought Bothwell, little guessing that Lethington, gentle and smooth of speech, was the deadliest snake of them all excepting only Moray. Those two fooled him to the top of his bent, and laughed to each other as they went their separate ways when all was plotted out.

Over Darnley meanwhile, at Glasgow Castle, had come a change. His servants one to another whispered that the King was "fey"—that strange Scots word which expresses a sure instinctive foreboding of the overshadowing wings of death. The chill purity of that air from the Unknown Land constrained him to thoughts very marvellous and touching to himself, though he associated them in no way with the closing of his book of life. He lay suffering, but more patient than his men had known him, very silent, often when they believed him asleep, viewing all the faultful past and realizing—but not fully, for his was an undeveloped soul—the ingratitudes and cruelties he had returned to her very noble and generous love. Through his political mistakes he could not see—ambition and hereditary right and arrogance still blinded him to those, but as he lay he promised himself that with health and all life open before his youth he would be wiser, firmer, and above all more generous in his relations with his wife—his son's mother. It came home to him with power that she had been right, right always, in pleading that united both could stand, apart both must fall. Well—he would not be ashamed to own his folly there, and together they would make great plots for the destruction of the traitors, beginning with Moray and Lethington whose cunning he knew bitterly well! If she would be convinced and grant him his proper place as King and husband, how strong and peaceable their power would be! And then lying in solitude, waking and sleeping, dreams of her would mingle in his half-dazed mind and show her most lovely fair, the very incarnation of beauty and womanly softness and gentle royalty that asks where it might command. He

had seen the most famous beauties of Elizabeth's, the French, the Scottish courts, but none like her—none! She had loved him, nursed him in sickness, given him royalty and power, until by shameful brutality and selfishness he had torn her clinging hands away, and left her to loneliness and cruel anxieties for the child, the Kingdom and himself.

It should be different now—very different! He would not tell her all his shame, for a husband must not humble himself to his wife, but he would act more wisely. That resolve strengthened each day in his convalescence. Then, with the romantic blood of the Stuarts stirring in his veins as he thought of the beauty and fragrance of the flower he had worn in his breast and cast so rudely away, he put pen to paper and wrote some words that should express his yearning for better things. Perhaps he would never show them to her, though if she were very tender and submissive, very quick to feel the change in him without compelling any humiliating admissions, he might.

Covered with emendations, half a work of would-be art, ("I too am a poet!") half of returning love, it read as follows at last:

The turtle for her mate
More grief may not endure
Than I do for her sake
Who has my heart in cure—(keeping)
—My heart which shall be sure
With service to the deed,
Unto that lady pure,
The weal of womanhood.

And no mirth till we meet
Shall cause me be content,
But still my heart lament
In sorrowful sighing sore,
Till that time she's present.
Farewell. I say no more.
Quoth King Henry Stuart.

He read it over with satisfaction that missed its faults and saw only its graces. She would like it if he permitted

may travel easily and be moved the sooner. You are glad ? "

He answered a little grudgingly : " If you will not stay with me, so best. Yes, I will go. I will go where you will on condition that we shall be together at bed and board, and husband and wife once more."

" Love, my coming was for that, and were it not so I had not been here this day ! I promise all shall be as you desire and I give you my hand upon it and the faith of my body. Doubt me no more. All is well. And now, what is this paper ? "

She took the poem in her hand and read it to herself while he closed his eyes in bliss upon her shoulder, then softly aloud, and folding the paper put it in her bosom.

" Verses from my own true love ! They are sweeter to me than Ronsard's at their sweetest. They bring back to me the stormy castle of Wemyss where you came to me and we wrote verses together for play. Have I your leave to keep them ? "

" Keep them, sweetheart, and God's grace go with them. I have a touch of music, have I not ? "

" More, and the child shall have it from the two of us. And now, a short farewell, beloved, for I am weary with riding and I will come again and be merry with you."

Great tenderness was in her heart as she left him with hollow eyes that followed her movements as she gave directions to the servants, and heard the physician's report, and so went waving a white hand at the door.

But she knew well in that wisdom which lies deeper than the heart's uttermost longing that for ever he would be her child—no king or knight or lover—but only the boy whose manhood was in her hands to guide as best she could, if even so much as that were possible.

Then later, moving him in her litter slung between two horses and wrapped in furs, riding beside him to watch over his weariness, she had him carried to Kirk O' Fields outside Edinburgh. Craigmillar would have been her choice for its fine air, but he had taken some disgust at it and would be master. Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood were not possible until contagion was past, and were besides too cold

and damp for his weakness ; and so the Provost's house was chosen by Moray and Lethington with careful regard for the King's betterment. So at least they told the Queen—she agreeing since no better might be.

" And because that house was once Our Lady's sanctuary, may it be a sanctuary for us both in peace and quiet until you can ride strongly in Edinburgh—a prisoner of disease set free ! " she said, laughing as she told him their destination. " They tell me it is a place highly situated in good air, surrounded with pleasant gardens and removed from noise, and that is my heart's desire for you."

Now this house was strongly built in stone, two stories above the basement, and with a narrow winding turret-stair easy to defend in need. Such a house would not have been Moray's choice had Darnley's death been determined by assassination, or the more usual terms of pistol or rapier. His plan lay deeper and more warily out of sight. Mines were dug in vaults, and gunpowder rammed into the corners of the foundations—Bothwell and the others contributing the gunpowder at their own risk, and sharing the cost of Darnley's riddance among them like any venture of commerce. And so, escorted by Bothwell as Sheriff of the Lothians and a great guard of nobles, the Queen came riding to Edinburgh and halted by the house in Kirk O' Fields, dismounting and taking Darnley by the hand to lead him to Hamilton House hard by which she believed to be the Provost's.

Smooth Moray was hovering behind her.

" That is not the house, Madam. It is here, and a very delectable place for such a convalescence as His Majesty's. You shall see how speedy shall be his recovery here, and bless God and the good air for it ! And Your Grace's orders were forthcoming, and I trust you shall see all done as you would have it."

So, undoubting, she brought him into the House of Death, a bitter house to her of mourning, woe and terror. But since the Fates blind the eyes of their victims she entered in a little hurry of pleasure, eager like a woman that he should see the generous plenishings, and know that she treated him as King indeed and one for whom only the best was acceptable.

The bedroom and presence-chamber were both decked

for a King's use although their size was by no means magnificent. A dais with double seat and canopy covered with silk in the royal colours turned the presence-chamber into royalty's reception room, the walls hung with splendid draperies of velvet. The bedroom was magnificent also—a great bed of violet-brown velvet passemented with gold and silver, cloths of velvet for the tables, high chairs, and all that a mighty Prince should need in a temporary lodging. Indeed he looked about him with pleasure.

She spent each day with him, returning to Holyrood at night, but because he loved her company and clung to it and time passed quickly in music and soft talking and the city gates would close early, she had a bedroom made for herself on the ground floor beneath his and a door removed from the stair so that he might come up and down to her when he would—as in the old happy first days of marriage. Had she known—or dreamed—that the house stood over mines of gunpowder she would have rested ill in that little chamber or in any corner of the doomed house! Each moment was deadly danger as men went about with dips and candles and torches.

Yet she and Darnley had their warning, for Lord Robert Stuart, Moray's brother and her own half-brother, came one night in a cold sweat of hurry and fear to Darnley, and found him playing chess with the gentleman-in-waiting who slept on duty in his room. Bidding the gentleman go, Lord Robert standing over the King, pale as a messenger from the grave, spoke in brief words, head turned over his shoulder to see none heard.

"Sir, I bid you leave this evil house, for it is within my knowledge that there is a deadly plot against you, and unless you escape from this now you shall never carry your life out of it. Flee, flee while you may, and take the Queen with you!"

For all answer, Darnley shouted for the page: "The Queen—the Queen!" staring at Lord Robert like one aghast until she came running up the stairs believing that illness only could cause the crying.

She found the men face to face, Lord Robert demented with fear and fury at Darnley's folly in revealing his secret errand to any—the Queen of all others. What! Could he not have walked out of the house like a man, taking his

wife with him, and held his fool's tongue till a better season? He would have said something but Darnley drowned his voice, loud and vehement in his story to the Queen, filling Lord Robert with terror for his own life from Moray.

"And if it be so, let us leave this moment as we stand. That Moray chose the house is enough! Come, let us go! To me, all honest men! A trap—an ambush!"

He raised his voice to a yell until the Queen rushing forward set her hand on his mouth.

"What is it, Robert? Speak!"

"It is nothing—nothing!" he answered sullenly. "I came to sit with the King. I told him of a dangerous brawl in one of the Wynds, and he cries out and says his death is decreed. I believe he is a madman—no better."

"What—you eat your words?" shouted Darnley.

"I eat no words. Let me go—fool and madman!"

The Queen caught her brother's hand.

"Robert—Robert! What is it? A plot and whose?"

"There is no plot. Let me go. I tell you he dreamed it. What—you will have it?"

For Darnley's dagger was flashing against his eyes. His own flashed in swift answer, and in a moment the two were clashing in a life and death struggle. The guard streamed in—the Queen calling wildly on Moray—and presently he entered, cool, unhurried as though a Queen's cries and the clash of steel were part of every day's drama.

"Be still—you fright the Queen. What is it, Madam?"

And, held apart though struggling still, the two listened as she told the story. Moray shot one deadly glance at his brother and covered it with the smile of the peace-maker.

"Madam, the King's brain is weak from his sickness. Robert, what guilt is yours—brawling in a sick chamber! Go, or these true men shall speed you. Madam, be calm—all is well, and the house guarded like Holyrood. Sleep in peace. The whole nation assures your safety."

His quiet calmed Mary as always, and she sat herself to soothe the wretched boy.

But as Moray descended the stair and met Bothwell in the garden outside he was thankful to meet him and breathe in his ear: "Suspicion once roused is a dog that wakes. We

must advance the enterprise and swiftly—swiftly! Can it be Sunday night?"

Bothwell reflected a moment. His mind was a slow-working ponderous process at best, and Moray's impatience was heaping him with silent insults.

Presently he answered: "Sunday let it be. Least said soonest mended;" and so turned off and vanished in the dark down a narrow wynd.

That Sunday night was to ring through Christendom with terror. For the Queen it was one of her rare nights of pleasure, since at Holyrood two marriages of faithful servants would be held with merriment, and honoured with her presence. For Bastian Paiges, master of the revels, would wed the flaxen-haired Christilly Hogg, and Margaret Carwood, John Stewart of Tullyuist. And to Margaret Carwood and Bastian she owed more than any honours would repay, since they had sped the escape of Darnley and herself from Holyrood after Riccio's murder. She provided the wedding robes of both brides in recognition—black velvet and great hanks of gold as embroidery for Margaret, black satin for the fair-haired Christilly. And to complete the honours and the gift of a rich pension to Margaret, the Queen had promised to put the brides to bed in the old Scots-English fashion. Her hand would throw the stocking for luck, and draw the curtain after the dancing and masquing which were to crown the evening of rejoicing.

Until the last moment she stayed with Darnley who was in a more subdued mood than usual having heard Mass that day. They sat side by side, speaking little, but content, and when she would have risen he held her hand.

"Stay a little, *mon amour*, the quiet pleases me," resting his head upon her shoulder and looking upward with beseeching eyes. She humoured him as always, lingering on until eleven, and then rose protesting sweetly as he held her again.

"Love, I would stay but I must not break my promise to Bastian. You would not have me do that?"

"But I come first, *ma mie*. If you will go, give your true lover a pledge of return. Give, or I hold you!"

He clutched her rich dress, and laughing she drew a diamond from her finger and pressed it on his.

"My pledge. To-morrow I come to make Your Majesty merry with the joy of our faithful servants. And now—good night. Sleep well and dream, dream——"

"Of my heart's heart!" he said, and kissed her tenderly. He stood awhile listening to her light foot descending the stair and the martial clank of the guard without. An order was given by the officer and they tramped away into the distance.

All sounds died and the darkness and silence of night engulfed the house like a rising tide. After due prayer he composed himself to sleep, and Taylor, a faithful English servant, extinguished all lamps but a faint cresset, and lay down in the small bed provided for the attendant in the King's bed-chamber. Night and sleep possessed the house to all seeming, yet within itself was no sleep or rest but evil eyes watching, evil shapes flitting—Bothwell with a cloak flung about him, whispering, ordering, seeing gunpowder stacked in the Queen's empty bedroom to make sure of the room above.

Then silence, dead silence. The night went onward soft-footed.

A roar of hell let loose shook the whole city. Men and women rushed to doors and windows. An earthquake—the roar of coming judgment? It shook the banqueting room at Holyrood where the Queen sprang to awe-stricken attention. God in Heaven, what was it? The city leaped awake like a bee-hive overturned, and madness of fear and suspicion possessed the air. Men rushed to Kirk O' Fields on the Queen's order, the city rushed with them.

The deadly house existed no longer. No longer would its evil roof affront the stars and sunshine. It lay a shapeless heap of ruins, "dung into dross," finished and done with for ever as a habitation of man, a rubble of broken stones.

The grooms of the King's chamber and two page-boys were found mangled and broken beneath the stones. But where was the King? None knew. They sought in panic, climbing with lanterns over and about the masses of masonry. Had he escaped, fleeing for his life? The February dawn showed like a grey rim on the sky though all the lower world was dark, when loud cries of terror broke from the orchard: "The King. The King!"

All rushed to the spot, stumbling and climbing, mad with haste. And there, lying beneath a tree eighty yards from the ruins, they found his body clad in a nightshirt only—and beside him his old servant Taylor, dead also.

CHAPTER XVII

WILD was the excitement raging and roaring in Edinburgh mobs fanned into flame by Moray's and Lethington's agents, their leaders at a safe distance, Moray having left Edinburgh, true to Lethington's assertion that he would look through his fingers at a deed, yet never be caught in it. He had reason to be a strong believer in the virtues of the alibi.

Within Holyrood, in darkness and silence, Mary, stupefied with shock struggled to collect herself, to realize the magnitude of the blow that had fallen on her hopes. She had known through all difficulties that one way and one only was possible, union close and sure with her husband, the father of her son, the man in whom the blood-royal of Scotland and England met and strengthened her own claim to the English crown. Therefore she had clung to him when all lover's love was dead, and only stern necessity and pity for wasted and misguided youth and their joint hope in the child were left to hold them together. But those bonds were strong and sure, and woven with the Catholic obligation of marriage held her fast against all temptations of divorce and freedom. What was freedom if it meant the loss of all she valued for her son, and deadly peril to her immortal soul? She could never marry while he lived.

Days after the murder she sat long in twilight with Mary Seton silent beside her. Not even her faithful love could plumb the Queen's immeasurable woe. She might suppose that anguish and horror at a vile murder were the sharpest pangs, and even these shot through with gleams of relief in freedom from a burden all but intolerable. Vile as the deed was, fulfilling Mary Seton's dark suspicion of Moray and his band, she could look beyond it now and see the Queen released, reigning with honour—unhampered by Darnley's

madness of vanity and churlish ambitions. Her grief must assuage itself with that realization. But Mary sat with pale shrunken face propped upon hands where the rings hung loose, withered into silence, stooped over her own dim reflection in the polished table and staring at it as if it dazed her into a quiet like death. And all day long and far into the night Mary Seton sat beside her. Sleeping herself then for sheer exhaustion, she could not tell whether the Queen slept, but the morning found her wakeful always with dim eyes fixed on the dawning window.

Now she could endure it no longer, for it approached madness if human nature stagnated for ever in such passivity. And also there was a bitter secret to tell—bitter urgency that she should hear.

"Madam—sweet Madam, speak to me," she said very low in the silent room. "I beseech you remember me that I love you, and speak to me."

A wan smile flickered on the Queen's lips and was gone. She stared still at her own image in the polished table and forgot all else. For love's sake Mary Seton persisted.

"Madam, shall I not know your inmost grief? Do you fear my Lord of Moray for your Prince and you?"

At that name a quiver passed across her face as if the nerves fluttered about mouth and eyes.

"I had forgotten him. Do not remind me," she said and returned to her dream of pain.

Mary Seton struggled against the overwhelming quiet: "Madam, I am half dead with fear and grief. What shall I do if you shut me out of your thought, for I am yours—the creature of your hand. Have pity on me."

That was the plea to touch her—the royalty in her nature replied instantly and always to any cry of grief. For the first time she looked at the girl, and stretching a cold hand laid it on her warm one. Mary Seton caught and cherished it between her palms. The Queen looked at her.

"What ails you, Mary Seton? I am well. I think there is no grief or fear can kill me. I shall live to be an old, old woman, gazing backward always at dead days, like the Jew who reviled our Lord Christ."

"But you have loved Him, Madam. You have served Him. For you there is no fear. Tell me your heart. What do your eyes see?"

Mary spoke at first as if labouring for words against a weight in her bosom. Then more swiftly.

"I see England lost. What should the English want of a country that murders her kings—and he was royal English as royal Scots. I see the cause of our Faith cast down in Scotland. His Holiness does not forgive me because I have not struck for it with fire and sword. But I could not. I will not. While the King lived Rome hoped. Now the Pope will desert me. I see my brother regent if I die, and the child——"

There her voice broke, and the silence was so long that Mary Seton ventured a trembling question—one with a note of hope in it.

"Madam, does Your Grace *now* distrust my Lord Moray? O, for the sake of the living God tell me you do! Where has your trust led you?"

She answered: "Hush!" with a finger laid on her lip. Then suddenly and wildly: "Whom can I trust? Who has been faithful? They have led me from hell to hell. I was too young. I was not fit to rule this country. They killed my mother. They have killed my husband. They will kill me—and my son——"

She checked herself as suddenly and again there was silence—Mary Seton holding her hand in a warm clasp of human love, with deep questioning eyes fixed upon her.

"Madam, if my Lord Moray has fled what minister should Your Grace have? And the people cry in the streets for an inquiry into the King's murder."

The Queen spoke bitterly: "I ask but a few days to mend my broken heart, and then I will shoulder the burden until it breaks me. I have offered great rewards to the man who reveals the plot and the murderers. I have kissed my husband's face and laid him to sleep by my father the King, and O I loved him once, Mary Seton, and the bitterness of death is less bitter than broken love. The empty heart—the dead cold! O for one blink of his bonny eyes at Wemyss! O for the days that are gone! Never again—to the end of time!"

She broke into bitter tears. Mary Seton saw them with a pang of relief—their burning flow should thaw the ice about her brain and heart. She lifted streaming eyes at last.

"I have awaked, and the pain is better than the numb

death of body and soul. Help me, Mary Seton—help! I must write to France. Have they written to England? What has happened while I lay dead? Tell me. Is the world up and doing or has all slept?"

Swiftly and with what skill she could Mary Seton possessed her of the chief events—France had been written to immediately by the Council. England also. That answer was now awaited. Darnley's servants—terrified by their master's fate—desired to return to England with speed but wished to take a loving farewell of the Queen. They would return to the protection of his mother Lady Lennox. If the Queen desired trusty messengers for any letter she desired to send to her they would gladly convey it. Edinburgh was in great tumult—crying out for the murderers that they might be found and done to death. Here she choked for a moment and halted, then continued swiftly, evasively, on Moray's flight and other things most necessary for the Queen to hear. Until Mary, seeing the urgency, gathered the heart of a Queen to face her royal duties, and a faint colour returned to lip and cheek as that strength of purpose strengthened her body.

"I have been a coward, Mary Seton, but you shall see—you shall see! Go—ask if the English letter of condolence is come. I must know my good sister's mind in this great matter. God send it does not gladden her, for she hated him. But surely she will pity me in this great anguish, and I will tell her that I lean on her now, for what else have I? Go. But darken the room. Her Killigrew shall not see my face."

Mary Seton ran to the door and was gone. This might be anguish but it was life not death, and hope winged her feet. It seemed long before she returned, preceding Killigrew the English Ambassador in deep mourning, walking as silently as if he picked his steps one by one. At the door he paused and bowed. Again, in the middle of the room, and then advancing, knelt at her feet, holding in his hand the packet folded, sealed, secured with silk, bearing the inscription which had sent it flying through England, through Scotland, to Edinburgh to comfort the Queen.

She took it from his hand with a faint word of greeting and did a strange thing. She lifted it to her lips and kissed it.

"We are of one blood, your Mistress and I—and I am

most utterly alone. This shall bring me her good heart and cheer me. I thank you, sir, for a hope. Now I shall not keep you. I will read it alone and you shall know my thanks to-morrow."

She stretched her hand for him to kiss, and the chill startled his lips. Then rising he bowed and moved backward to the door, consumed with curiosity and a feeling as near pity as diplomats can permit themselves. In the black room he had not seen her face.

Her lips moved as if in prayer as the seals fell apart and yielded their formally folded treasure.

The Queen unfolded it and read :

" Madam,

My ears have been so much shocked, my mind distressed and my heart appalled at hearing the horrible report of the abominable murder of your husband, my slaughtered cousin, that I have scarcely as yet spirits to write about it, but although nature constrains me to lament his death, so near to me in blood as he was, I must tell you boldly that I am more concerned for you than for him. O, Madam, I should neither perform the office of a faithful cousin nor that of an affectionate friend if I studied rather to please your ears than to preserve your honour ; therefore I will not conceal from you that people for the most part say that you will look through your fingers at this deed instead of revenging it, and that you have not cared to touch those who have done you this pleasure as if the deed had not been done without the murderers having that assurance. Elizabeth R."

She gave it to Mary Seton, mute as death for a moment. Then, choosing each word with precision she spoke with dry lips.

" There are worse murderers than those who take life, and this woman is one. I believed I had sounded the ocean but there is a deeper. She brands me with my husband's murder. On your allegiance I charge you, Mary Seton—tell me—is this the rumour in Edinburgh ? "

Mary Seton's knees tottered under her as she answered : " Madam, it is."

Standing with her hand resting on the table, the Queen said, still choosing her words with dry and painful exactitude: "To-night I will be alone. Let none come near me."

"Mary Stuart, my darling, my heart's heart—no, not alone. In God's name and His Mother's! I entreat by His Passion—no."

She had clutched the Queen's black dress who stooped and detached it—then passing into her bedchamber locked the door. All night Mary Seton sat outside on the floor, her head leaned against it, praying, imploring God's mercy. Not a sound, not a movement, answered from the woman within. In the morning Mary Seton rose and called for the French maids to help her. Jane Kennedy appeared.

"They have fled. Riccio's fate and the King's have broken their courage. They fled to Leith last night, and a ship sailed this morning for France. And—oh Mary Seton, there is a placard set up in the town where all may read: 'Farewell, gentle Henry, but a vengeance on Mary.' In the light of day! It is Moray's doing. God reward him according to his iniquities!"

"He destroys her good name because the people love her. Better stab her at once and fling her beautiful body into earth and forget her! O the crime of the father visited on the innocent daughter! The base-born brother—the snake. But vengeance is sure. In a waking dream last night I saw one that pursues him—one of the many he has worse than murdered. The hell of Judas for him for ever and ever. And may I see him burn!"

She spoke like a fury—white face aflame, hands clenched beside her. Jane Kennedy stared at her in alarm. This was not the Mary Seton sweet-voiced and merry, of the old dear days in France. France—it lay like a land of heaven, kind and hospitable, bathed in sweet sunshine and rejoicing rain—a memory of youth and Paradise. This terrible Scotland—a dark hag, struggling for life with England at her throat—wild, dealing death right and left like a maniac in her frightful struggle for existence. What hope among these barbarians for beauty, grace and noblest powers of mind and body? No—they too must be trampled into the bloody mire of the lust for place and power which all men sought in Scotland.

The door opened and Mary Stuart came out and stood

looking at them. Pale from her night's vigil she was calm and self-controlled now. What visitings, prayers and strengths had closed about her for succour could not be told, but the storm of yesterday had sunk into the clear shining after rain. There was no strain about it. She spoke with the simple natural grace that was a part of her charm.

"I was weak yesterday, Mary Seton and my Kennedy, and I grieve for the trouble it brought your loving hearts. Now I would have you know I am well. Strength has come back to me in the shock of the Queen's letter, and this battle must be fought not only with courage but wisdom. Thanks be given to God that we have many proofs of our innocence that needed no proof, and these shall be set forth for the world's judgment. It is likely that many suspect the murderers. Those who could contrive Riccio's murder may well be guilty of this. I say no more as yet. To-day and to-night I spend in prayer for my husband's soul—prayer for forgiveness for my worst crimes toward him, impatience and anger at his youthful folly which I should rather have pitied. To-morrow to my business. My brother will return when he knows the English Ambassador is here. The English are his true friends."

She spoke without irony and calmly.

That day was given to prayer and fasting, the night also until the grey of dawn, and that day the Queen met her Council. The chief business was consideration of the treasonable placards posted up in secrecy at the street corners. Several were brought in and laid before her, and she received them with a face immovable as marble. They had taken on a new development in the last few days and a sinister and dangerous one, such as this :

> *Because proclamation is made that whosoever shall reveal the murderers of the King, I who have made inquisition affirm that the Queen assented thereto through the persuasion of the Earl of Bothwell.*

A rough cartoon represented the Queen as a siren crowned and with a fish-tail—sceptre in her hand—dangerous and beautiful even in that rude handling. One after another they were laid before her with sharp-eyed watching to see how she would take them—how deep the dart was driven !

One after another she received them, looked through them indifferently and laid them down, returning to business at once.

She spoke presently with composure: "My Lords, we are met for the discovery of the authors of a crime so horrible that the whole world stands aghast, and on me who most suffer from it, and on you, falls the burden of discovery. The Earl of Lennox, father of the King my husband, demands this inquisition. I most of all demand it. If further reason were wanting than natural affection these infamies give it to me."

She held up a bill with the letters M.R. upon it and a hand holding a sword, and near it the letters L.B. for "Lord Bothwell" with a murderous mallet above it.

Displaying it, she laid it down and continued: "Thus I find my name aspersed in company with that of my Lord Bothwell as art and part in the deed. If he be innocent as I—the more foul is the injustice. I call upon all good men and true who have any knowledge of the criminals to disclose the same on pain of death and dishonour."

She had risen energetically, and so stood a moment as if with controlled strength that she would not yet loose upon them. Bothwell seated at the end of the table facing her, looked up and round the table with his sullen defiant gaze. In Moray's absence the highest position in the Council and ministry fell to him, and beside him sat Argyll, the husband of her half-sister, with Lethington, the subtlest of them all—rejoicing under grave faces at the success of the slowly closing net, which was to catch Bothwell with the Queen, and doom both to ruin. He had served his turn in committing the murder for them. Let him pay for it now!

He rose clumsily—his bulky person ill-fitted in a loose doublet of black velvet—and leaning both hands on the table spoke unafraid. No doubt he thought Moray would come riding back to Edinburgh and set the matter straight. It was beyond his wits. His rough voice rang through the great room.

"Madam, Your Majesty says well. I am a man guiltless and unafraid, and if any person of honour comes forward to make this scandalous charge upon my good name I challenge him to mortal combat, and to this end I throw down my gauntlet before you all."

The steel glove rattled on the table. Argyll half rose, but under it Lethington's foot secretly touched his as he sat between the two. Argyll reseated himself. Not a word! Silence, silence, until they could confer with Moray—unless indeed it were left to Lethington himself. He only, in his own opinion and that of Moray, was fitted to deal with it. A pause and he rose, his smooth voice silvery after the hoarse speech of Bothwell.

"Your Majesty and my Lords, one would suppose that Scotland had troubles enough to bear in the sorrowful loss of her King without cruel aspersions cast upon the characters of the highest in the land such as my Lord Bothwell. Yet when the greatest are charged they, even they, must for their own sakes and the peace of the public mind submit to strict inquisition, and in my humble and weakly opinion my Lord does not act wisely in flinging down a gage of battle in defence of what should be tried far otherwise, if his fame must remain unstained. This thought I commend to his consideration."

There was silence, all faces addressed first to the Queen and then to Bothwell, who sat flushed darkly with the effort to concentrate his wits on the meaning of Lethington's utterance. Were they treacherously deserting him? Would they denounce him and save their own skins, or was Lethington giving him a lead which he should be swift to take in his own interest? He stared helplessly at Mary Fleming's bridegroom—the black velvet showing up his delicate fine-cut features and the fair pointed beard above his close ruff. His perfumed leather boot pressed Bothwell's lightly under the table. Aha, then it was a lead! He must take it with a high hand, and if not a lead so much the worse for them. He rose again clumsily, adventuring on as a bull on thin ice, purple with suppressed fury and doubt.

"If a man is to be denounced for the sake of placards stuck up on town walls, unsigned, unsupported, and if decent folk take such for a true and worthy denunciation, then denounced I am, though hitherto Her Majesty and the late King were pleased to honour me. But let that fly stick in the wall for I care not, not I! And if fools and base demand it or the Lords of Her Majesty, again I care not, and I will stand my trial like any Dick or Sandy of them all.

Therefore in full Council I say this—I, James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, being charged with treasonable knowledge and abetting of a foul crime refuse so dirty a blot on my good name, and demand my trial."

He paused a moment and looked round defiant, with the peculiar one-eyed glance that shifted his head as he focused each in turn. Under the table Lethington's foot touched Argyll's significantly as Bothwell resumed: "And I hereby offer myself a prisoner to remain in ward until after the assize."

He sat down and men were silent, Mary looking at him steadfastly as if to decipher his bearing. She thought it honest though repulsive. Charged as they were together, knowing her own innocence, why should not he also be the prey of ruthless enemies? As well one as another! Her look had something of pity in it—of the mutual understanding of fellow-sufferers. He had met the charge with boldness which appeared impossible if there were guilt to sink him.

Lethington rose again.

"My Lord Bothwell's tender does him honour. Certain it is that the public mind must be satisfied. Certain also that he having offered his person freely as surety, there is no need to hold him in ward until the assize. At which God send him a good deliverance!"

So it was agreed. As the Council dispersed, and Lethington stood alone in the recess of the great window looking out to see whether his horses and men were in readiness, Bothwell swaggered up to him, thrusting his head forward with what Lethington thought an odious gesture of defiance.

"Aha, Master Lethington, so you remembered the story of the ape that made the cat pull the chestnuts from the fire. You thought I might be used for this and then disused, as the saying is. Fine dealings and safe if I had not thought of it also—I who know you and Moray naked to the bone! Do you recall a certain bond for the murder of Darnley?"

Lethington paled and stiffened, and Bothwell's one eye keen as two, saw it with glee.

"Yes, a bond plain written enough for a court of law and Sir James Craig's—the judge's eye—upon it! Moray's

name, your own, and many another goodly fellow's. Well—you did not know where that bond was gone. You thought Moray had it and Moray thought Morton. A dangerous bit of paper, all said and done! But *I* know who has it and I give you his name—James Hepburn Earl of Bothwell—and he holds it dearer than life, knowing it will save his life and honour at a pinch."

Suddenly his tone of ferocious jesting changed to bitter gravity.

"I tell you this, William Maitland of Lethington—you have forced me upon this trial. Am I a fool that I do not guess where the placards come from? Or recognize your hand and Moray's? Take this warning. If I swing for it or lose my head, not a man of you all but shall swing or bleed beside me. And the day may yet come that I wash my hands in your heart's blood, one and all. And so good day to you."

He strode off, triumphant and ruffianly, to ride through Edinburgh and tear down the seditious placards which sprang up like mushrooms about the city. He shouted, swore, and denounced all his enemies, but held back his knowledge for the trial, then returned to Holyrood demanding to see the Queen.

Straightway he went to her and fell on his knees.

"We are charged with foul murder, Madam, you and I, and the one of us as innocent as the other. But I tell Your Majesty that my sword is yours, my heart is yours, and you have no more to fear from the Lords than from a lamb's bleating. I know that of them in former plots that shall blast them in men's eyes. Make good cheer and wait the good days that are coming fast upon you."

A feeble glimmer of hope struggled through her cloud. Surely a diamond, rough as felspar, but still a diamond! She eyed him with the wan look which made her beauty so touching that Mary Seton could not see her without a heart-pang. That was not how it moved Bothwell. His was a very worldly passion to grasp and clasp her in rough arms, with all the lands and baronies she represented and all the power and State—together with the beauty which stung unslaked desire, and the charm that drew him after her as flower-perfume draws a fierce wild bee to its plundering. He was meditating a divorce now from bonny Lady

Jean Gordon to whom he had given ample provocation with his Bessie Crawford and the rest. Suppose the Queen could be induced to consider him her only bulwark and protector, what then but his dream at Hermitage come true—deliciously and unbelievably true? He licked his coarse lips in thinking of it.

She answered firmly: "My Lord, I believe your innocence as I believe my own. My eyes are opened. I see that if I had followed your counsel years since in distrusting my brother and his band—and especially at the time of Riccio's murder when you and Huntley rescued me—I had been a happy woman and Queen. Thus, I trust you for myself, my son, and the kingdom, remembering your true service to my mother now with God."

She stretched her hand and he kissed it, bowing only, an unusual thing. She thought him moved by her speech and dismissed him, herself the happier for what had passed.

But Lethington rode hard to Moray in Fifeshire and arrived breathless and all but fordone with his journey, forgetting his courtliness, thrusting himself into the room where Moray sat with his sallow countess holding state as a princess of the blood-royal, instead of mere wife to a bastard whose very name was given him by his royal sister's favour. She disappeared at once.

"What are we all but fools in the hands of bloody Bothwell?" demanded Lethington. "Could we not trust your Lordship for that one service to hide the bond where no interested person could find it?"

"And so I did!" cried Moray. "And what then?"

"Bloody Bothwell has it, and he defied me to my face after the council, and dares the trial and what not, as knowing he can ruin us one and all. And what *then*?"

After his first startled movement Moray relapsed into quiet deep thought after his fashion. His rapt look fixed upon the country beyond the high window might have been mistaken for prayer. His lips even moved slightly. Lethington was in the habit of jesting at "Moray's prayers" and the iniquities they prefaced, but he was quiet now, breathless to see what would come of the meditation. Finally the arch-plotter, the Light of the Reformers, the friend of John Knox spoke.

"I could have wished it differently, but being as it is it

must be met. Bothwell must be acquitted. Until that is done we cannot link him with the Queen. That done, there is nothing we may not hope from her confidence in him. We may ourselves propose their marriage—Bothwell at least will take the bait. And once swallowed we have them—we have them ! Sleep here this night, Lethington, my right hand, and ride back light-hearted to-morrow to Holyrood."

CHAPTER XVIII

MORAY resolved that no power on earth should induce him to be present at the trial of Bothwell. His detestation of him grew daily, and the more so because he knew himself to be in his power. At the present moment he could neither countenance nor discountenance him, for the deeper, more intricate parts of the game were yet to be played, and the path of safety was narrow as a hair. Bothwell must not be too much discredited by the Lords for they had resolved to marry him to Mary and overwhelm them in common ruin. Yet he must not be too openly countenanced, for afterwards they must represent him as the blackest of murderers and mankind. Lethington would have had Moray remain in Scotland though in the background, and direct operations from that point of vantage. Moray, trusting none of his associates too well, preferred rather to advise them through messengers who could be disowned if occasion arose, and to seek Elizabeth's ear for the furtherance of dark and far-reaching schemes which only Lethington knew or guessed.

Accordingly he betook himself to Edinburgh, held the necessary conferences with Killigrew the English Ambassador, and announced to Mary that he was leaving the country for five years, shocked to the heart's core by the murder of the King.

"But if I am brought low and the country so deeply troubled surely now is the time to support me, brother?" she said, looking steadfastly into his eyes and with an expression new to him. He found her much changed since the tragedy of Kirk O' Fields, graver, (but that was natural) calmer, (and that was strange) but above all slower to speak, considering more deeply, mastering her passionate impulses of love and trust. She had not clasped and kissed him on his arrival after her sisterly fashion. There was reserve,

almost imperceptible, but present. Did it shade into distrust ? No, she could know nothing ! His alibi had been perfect, and for his own sake Bothwell could never produce the bond.

Again she repeated : " Would you be a fair-weather friend ? What have I done that you should desert me in my worst need ? Darnley's father is set on this trial of Bothwell though I see no proof against him, and would be loath to think a man so trusted capable of so foul a deed. What is your own belief, brother ? "

" My belief matters little, Madam. It is not belief but proof that counts before the law. Bothwell, like most, has his virtues and faults. I believe you have found him faithful in his rough fashion—as did Her Grace, your royal mother."

" That is truth," she answered slowly. " My husband's father has been warned to appear at the trial and give evidence against him as the accuser. But—end as it will—the trial will shake Scotland and England. I need help and guidance. If I ask you to stay, will you still desert me, brother ? I have served and enriched you. I—I have loved you. Have you nothing for me ? You have not helped me in the past."

Her manner was strangely quiet. She appealed in words, but there was no appeal in her eyes nor in the locked hands which lay in her lap. Moray's instinct, faultless with the men he wished to subjugate, misled him here. He thought her cowed and broken, even despairing, and took a higher tone than he had ever ventured.

" Madam, you ask what is impossible. I am in deep debt, weary of public business where I cannot have my own say, and am for ever crossed and tangled by womanish whims. Yourself knows that no mortal man could tell whom to obey or follow, yourself or the late King, for you would sooner at all times please him than follow the Kingdom's good or your own——"

She interrupted him, but with perfect serenity : " Yet now he is gone if you considered my helplessness, if I were biddable and docile—would you stay ? "

" Not for the world's wealth ! " His answer was swift as a bullet, his look a most enlightening flash of hate that lit up the past, as a dart of lightning at midnight discloses a livid landscape.

She noted but proceeded with the same quiet: "Then I will plead no more. But I make a request. Or say rather, a command. I desire that you do not enter England or France. If you will go, let it be to Flanders. There you shall serve me best."

He took her hand and kissed it, and she did not offer to kiss his cheek. Women's whims! But when he looked back she was weeping with hidden face. After all she still loved him, still needed him, he thought with satisfaction. He could play upon that string when all else failed. He dropped the curtain over the door and went away content.

But Mary, having made her last test, wept for dead love, dead trust, the belief of a whole life; and in all the world is no sadder funeral.

A week later as she sat forsaken, the loneliest woman in all her Kingdom, a letter was brought her from the Archbishop of Glasgow, her trusty ambassador in France, with a second warning more deadly than the last. The blood fell from her lips as she read, knowing what tales of horror must be at work in Paris—Paris that had loved her with a heart given to few. The good Archbishop wrote:

> "I ask Your Majesty's pardon that I write thus, but I must write that all may come to your knowledge. It is needful that you should show now the great virtue, magnanimity and constancy that God has granted you, by whose grace I hope you shall preserve that reputation you have in all godliness acquired so long. It can appear in no way more clearly than that you do such justice that the whole world may know your innocence, and witness for ever of their treason who have committed so cruel and ungodly a murder."

So she was on her trial with Bothwell! So all the world would judge her by the result, and the only hope of her acquittal in the world's eyes was that he should be found guilty and mercilessly punished. But what could she do? Of her own knowledge she knew nothing against him, was unable to gather a shred of proof, nothing but wild and whirling accusations which included herself. Could it be that Darnley's father Lennox held such proofs? If so, he

must produce them at the trial. She saw no other hope. Moray and Lethington were darkly silent. Whatever they knew or believed they would say nothing, and the public accusers were nameless. None had openly charged the man but Lennox. All depended upon the evidence he must have secured.

Mary Seton who had come in on Moray's going, sat on a low stool, looking up into her face to see what new trouble was come upon them, and read the fear in her eyes. Mary laid the letter in her hand. She took counsel often now with Mary Seton. Swift in intuition and reason, loyal as knighthood itself, loving as the simplest woman, there was no alloy in the gold of her nature—the true daughter of a great house. She read it and laid it down, musing.

"Madam, the good Archbishop is right. Yet it is certain Bothwell will escape. The Lords must have it so. He knows their guilt!"

Mary caught her hand.

"You know it and how?"

Mary Seton knelt beside the great chair drawing the Queen's head down that she might whisper in her ear, so low that it was more the motion of her lips that conveyed her meaning than the faint sound.

"Madam, I was in the great curtains by the window when my Lord Bothwell spoke with Lethington after the Privy Council, and I heard him tell Lethington that he held a bond signed with the names of the murderers and——"

The Queen's hand gripped her wrist like steel.

"Whose?"

"I heard two only—My Lord Moray's and Lethington's, but he taunted Lethington with more—many more. And Lethington made no answer—he is a secret man, and his face I could not see. So I knew I must discover what he did next, and I went to Mary Fleming and talked with her of embroidery, and her brave new husband Lethington came in white as if the miller had rubbed his face in flour, and he said: 'Dear my love, I ride to the country this day. Have my saddlebags made ready.' And she said: 'Love, again? And me who lie cold without you! To Fifeshire again? What use to be a new-made wife?' And he

laughed saying 'Fifeshire? No, my pretty one. It is only to Wemyss and back.' But I knew it was Fifeshire, Madam, and I watched him go. He was gone to tell my Lord Moray, and it is because of this that my Lord Moray leaves the country. He would not be safe if my Lord Bothwell tells the truth in the world's face. And, Madam, they plot to say you knew and encouraged the murderers."

Her eagerness matched the Queen's. Drawing back they stared at each other as if each struggled to find the truth in the other's face.

Then Mary Stuart whispered in the other Mary's ear: "Was Bothwell's name to the bond? Did Lethington taunt him with his own danger? Think well! Life and death and more are on it for me. I think he is the only man I may trust in my despair. A ruffian, but may be true."

"And these men need ruffians to fight them, for no gentleman can. Madam, as God lives, I think Bothwell's name was not to the bond, for most surely Lethington must have taunted him with his own danger. Madam, my Lord Bothwell is a ruffian. My body and soul shrink from him, yet if he is true it may be you can use him now to break these murderers. I cannot tell—I tremble to say it, so great are the dangers either way. And, Madam, England is in it—England! Mary Fleming told me this thing—incredible is that Queen's wicked statecraft, but true."

Mary gripped her hands.

"Her very words?"

"Madam, Mary Fleming is honest, though for her sins she is Lethington's wife. She said: 'Mary Seton, remember how Riccio's murder was plotted with the English—Randolph knew it! He let that slip to Mary Beton after it was done. I tell you this for truth, that the King's murder was known and approved in England also before they struck him.' And I said: 'How? Who can believe such things?' She said: '*That* I may not tell you, but I know well.' Madam, she is Lethington's wife. If the day ever comes when you would trust England and the cruel Queen, remember this and die sooner! That murder's root was in England."

Her body trembled with the energy of her speaking. Who knew so well as she Mary's greatest peril—her open trusting heart and quick impulse to believe men and women what they seemed. No reader of character she, but a passionate believer in all high romance, in chivalry and truth and gallant deeds, and yet doomed to live and labour among men, the basest of their kind in creeping statecraft. Always she threw some glamour of belief over the ugliness of the seared and hardened rocks where no flowers of love or pity could grow for ever and ever. And nothing but her wild reckless courage to back her foolhardy confidence!

"What am I to do with her? How can I terrify her into wisdom?" thought Mary Seton in despair, as she watched the fair face that was to lead so many to ruin!

"But Bothwell is true!" the Queen repeated as if meditating on the man. "He is not a deceiver—nature has not so made him. His face is coarse and displeasing, his voice matches. The glare of his one eye in fury drives men before him, and he gains his end that way and not through cunning. I pity the woman who wedded him—bonny Jean Gordon—she deserved better. Yet if his blockish nature is true—lions, they say, can love a master, and I think he loves me."

"But how, Madam, how? Men like him may love to rend and ruin for their own possession and delight. I dare not say, trust him. I dare not say, mistrust him. But I think that however accused he was not in the King's murder and I think not in the English Queen's pay."

Again Mary reflected, then drawing a long breath sh said: "I will see him and alone. Send for him."

Mary Seton's heart fluttered at the magnitude of the decision.

"Madam, I fear you must, and the more because in the Archbishop's letter we did not read the sentence following. I have it here. He says:

> "The Spanish Ambassador when I thanked him in Your Majesty's name for the knowledge he gave me of the plot against the King, answered: 'Even if it came too late, yet tell Her Majesty that I am informed by the same means that there is still some notable enter-

prise in hand against her of which I wish her to beware in time.' "

Madam, we must have help, and it may be my Lord Bothwell knows of their evil-doing there as in the other matter."

So Mary Seton, all unknowing opened Bothwell's way for him. There is no greater bitterness in Fate than that one who loves should drive the beloved into danger he would die to avert.

When Bothwell came it was with no surprise. He had perceived that slowly and certainly events were driving her into his hands, and told himself that with her trust in him, and his mastery of the Lords through their guilt he would be King of Scotland within the year. Not as Darnley had been, a puling King Consort at the Queen's mercy, but master and more. With more control than men credited, he could however play the waiting game, and when he entered, bowing deeply, it was with an air of humility. She offered her hand that he might kiss it as he knelt, but he looked up surprised, and the hand dropped beside her.

" Madam, I thank Your Highness, but to have the honour to kiss your hand is not for a man who stands in suspicion of foul murder and treason. With my own will I would be a prisoner this day until I stood forth a cleared man, or went to the heading-block as one shamefully condemned."

She looked him in the face, her own twisted with emotion, as though to wring the truth from his inmost soul.

" My Lord, my mother and I trusted you, and not in vain. Your sister and my younger brother Stuart were man and wife, though he is now dead, therefore we are akin. I honoured your mother. You are Warden of the Border, Lord Admiral of Scotland, and my chief minister now that my brother has left me. Also you are a sworn knight of great orders. You could not lie to me if you would. If I question, will you answer as before God ? "

In moments of fear or haste Bothwell had a stutter that impeded his words. He stuttered now.

" M-Madam, have I failed in truth that you ask this solemnly ? "

" I cannot tell. You have failed more than once in loyalty and obedience."

"Never again, Madam, I swear to Your Grace, never! I will answer in all that breaks no bond with others."

She caught at the word "bond," forgetting all else. Unbidden to rise he still knelt before her.

"Tell me then for the sakes I have cited to you and in God's name before whom you also kneel, are you innocent of the death of my husband—innocent in thought, word and deed?"

Again the words caught in his throat, but he looked her hardily in the face.

"I am innocent in thought, word and deed, Madam. How else should I come in Your Majesty's presence?"

She said very low: "Thank God"—so low that it is doubtful if he heard her, and instantly offered her hand again.

"I desire you to kiss my hand, my Lord!"

He kissed it, bowing his head over it so that his face was invisible.

"And now, be seated beside me. My questions are not yet done."

She pointed to a chair before her, and he rose and took it gracelessly as he did all, but yet again, as he did all, with a certain force which made him noticeable.

"My next question is—innocent yourself, do you know the doers?"

He reflected hurriedly. Dangerous alike to say or to deny! Could she by any chance have heard of the existence of the bond, and if so would it be for his hurt or good? To gain time he parried.

"Madam, a man may suspect who were the King's enemies. Surely Your Majesty knew them? Cast your mind back to Riccio."

"That is true. And you did your utmost then to drag me from their toils. That too is a debt from me to you. Still, since I can trust you and you me—again I say—have you certain knowledge?"

His fate hung in the balance. Had he denied knowledge, she who took Mary Seton's word for gospel would have distrusted him then and for ever. He could not know that, but he saw a bold stroke needed, and struck.

"Madam, if I trust Your Majesty with a matter of life and death, have I two promises from Your Grace? The one

is to reveal what I tell you to no man or woman, for telling it my life is in your hand. The other is to ask me no more than I may tell with honour. One day you shall know all, but now my will is to be secret until I can strike! Have I your royal word?"

Trusting him wholly, she made answer: "I pledge my word as a Queen. I will keep faith."

It removed his last hesitation. He knew that Darnley had said truth in asserting that no man would trust her pledge in vain. "She is a true Princess, and I will stake my life on her integrity in word and deed."

He leaned forward with a rugged hand on either knee, and stared at her with his dull smouldering eye—a terrible fighting face indeed!

"Madam, I know who they are one and all. No—not suspect! I *know*. By a strange chance, not to be told, a paper fell into my hand which is damning evidence. And I tell you this. I do but live to get power in the country sufficient to take every man of them by the throat and choke him with his own treachery and treason in payment for the grief and harm he has done his rightful Queen. I am a rough plain man, and I have no room for smooth traitors. Now you have the truth—a light by which to read many a dark passage. Again I say: remember Riccio, and the threads are in your hand."

It kindled her. She grasped the arms of her chair as if to rise in triumph. Then controlled herself.

"My Lord, I thank you. I also know, and together we will crush them. I do not forget Riccio. I need ask no more of that. I thank God for your aid. And now, another question. Where is my brother gone?"

"Madam, your own knowledge should tell you. To England. To the Queen. They plot together your deposition. You are to be a prisoner in Lochleven and the child in England, and Moray her regent in Scotland."

This was true and she felt it. His every word confirmed her belief in him—and her own dark suspicions of Moray. He looked to see her tremble and fail, but she kindled instead, a bright flame of valour.

"I knew it—I read it in his false face," she cried. "I made a test and he broke under it. I knew it was England.

But with you true to me we will trample him yet—the villain, the smooth-faced traitor!"

Her face fired into youngest beauty, younger than her four and twenty years. His blood burned at her brilliant eyes. He stood leaning on his sword glad at heart. He had beaten Moray's wit and Lethington's skill. He had won her—and with her the Crown.

She was on her feet too, facing him, one slim hand laid on the carved chair-back, a girl for all her widowhood and child.

"My Lord, there is more. I must not lose you. They have spread these lies of you tc get you in their net. They have forced this trial. You shall not let yourself be tried—they will ruin you, they will kill you—and me with you. Tell all the world what you know now—this living day, and there shall be no trial. They are as full of poison and subtlety as vipers. Defy them in the world's sight."

He pressed nearer to her.

"Madam, consider. Moray is in hiding behind Elizabeth's petticoats. We could not get him. Lethington is booted for instant flight, Morton is over the Border. And so forth. No—no. Now is not our moment. Also if I am to be your worthy minister, the Scots people must see me take my trial and stand acquitted like the poorest among them. How else face them, with rumours and whispers and placards from our foes darkening the air? Moreover, know this—holding what I hold they will not dare find me guilty—you may wager your crown on that and safely. I shall be acquitted, as I should be if I were guilty as they. The judges are their creatures. No, Madam, let Your Grace take a rough soldier's counsel. Make your enemies serve your turn as they shall serve ours yet. Trust to me—I have not watched on your Border for years against the rats of England in vain. Sleep easy on your pillow, nor dim your bright eyes with tears. All shall be well."

She gladdened, feeling her charm on him for the first time—the woman's charm on the man, the Queen's on her subject, the joy of common purpose and interests. At last here was the man she could trust. A man indeed, perhaps the more a man for his lack of graces and smooth

words. She cast her eyes to heaven—most angel-fair in the black she wore for his crime—and seeing her so beautiful, desire swelled in him like a wave of fire, and so nearly licked up all cold prudence in flame that he trembled at his own nearness to destruction.

"Madam, have I your leave to go? These are no idle times for me, and also I must not have your countenance until I am a cleared man. But there is one thing I would tell you that you may know your servant through and through. My wife Jean seeks divorce from me, and it must go through for I have not been true man to her—I own it at your feet. I do not ask you to forget and forgive this fault. I am as I am, but hope to be a man more leal and true now I have earned my liege lady's trust. Let Jean tell you her story. It is ill to hear but I would have you know the worst of me. Truth is a plain speaker but endures."

"Yet you loved her! Your marriage was joy to you both!" Mary said faintly. This confirmed Moray's words at Hermitage Castle, and the blot on the man and her newborn trust in him hurt her like a blow.

"Madam, I did not love her. I loved a woman that could never be my wife. But may I go? Times now wait for no man."

He went after a kiss of no significance upon her hand, thanking his stars he had escaped the deadly sweet temptation of her presence. He must not see her too often until time was ripe, or she would play Moray's game innocently but as surely as Moray himself.

Mary Seton rushed in when he was gone.

"O Madam, what?"

With exultation shining in her eyes the Queen told her.

"True as steel. I tested him by your knowledge. I tested him every way and I say—steel-true and blade-bright! Do we near the end of our woes, Mary Seton? See! We need dread the trial no more. Lennox will not dare accuse my Lord Bothwell. He knows too much of Lennox's own plots. O, my glad heart! I see deliverance!"

There was indeed nothing to dread in the trial either for Bothwell or those who valued him. Such of the Lords as

were in Scotland rallied about him not daring to do otherwise. Lethington, in Moray's inmost secrets and beholding the trial as a step to attainment of his and Moray's purpose, rode by Bothwell's side to the Tolbooth in the character of a firm unflinching friend. The Justice General of Scotland, the Earl of Argyll—himself a relative of Moray's and in league with him—presided. The judges were Moray's brother-in-law, Lord Lindsay of the Byres, Henry Balnaves and Macgill—his creatures. The jurors were peers. The charge stood that he was "art and part in the horrible slaughter of the right excellent, right high and mighty Prince, the King's Grace, dearest spouse to our Sovereign Lady, the Queen's Majesty."

Bothwell pleaded innocence, and, no witness against him appearing, Darnley's father the Earl of Lennox was called into court. A servant of his entered with a paper, and read it aloud to the effect that his Lord could not appear by reason of the shortness of the time, and because he was in fear of his life. He demanded that the trial be postponed until such time as he could bring sufficient proofs, and he required the murderer should until then be held as prisoner.

The Court however held (doubtless under Moray's direction) that trial must be made that day, sufficient notice having been given to Lennox. Bothwell produced a few witnesses who swore an alibi and he was acquitted without either triumph or displeasure in Court, so plainly had the end been foreseen by all, from the Queen to the lowest person in Scotland. And probably every person in Scotland and England, the Queen alone excepted, held him for the head and front of the murderers. The matter dropped dead from that moment so far as any real inquisition into the guilt of either Bothwell or any other person was concerned.

"Madam, I told you they would not dare, and Your Grace believed me," was Bothwell's comment to the Queen. "Believe me yet again. The time will come that we shall dare them to their own faces and they shall not deny their guilt. I have my proofs in a sure place. And now, being a cleared man, I take my right to kiss Your Majesty's hand as your Lord Admiral should."

And it was sore, sore to Mary Seton's faithful heart to

know the man believed a murderer by every honest man in Scotland, and yet to see him rise daily in favour and trust. Also his ruffianly face and ways sickened her beside the pale face of the Queen and her clear confiding truth. It could not be otherwise. And yet——

CHAPTER XIX

WITH the acquittal of Bothwell came the confirmation of the great offices held by him. That was inevitable, and yet for the Queen a fresh and terrible danger in her way. Elizabeth, hearing it in England, smiled at a mistake from which her own strength would have extricated her whether God or man had forced it upon her.

What! Have a man Lord Admiral and guide of the State who had stood his public trial for the King's murder, who had been acquitted only by those who dared not convict, who was believed by all Europe to be dripping with Darnley's blood! Not only this, but a man steeped in lust, a savage in his promiscuous loves and hates, his very look and walk betraying the beast half-civilized and the more dangerous! That the Queen should see him daily, trust herself and the Kingdom to his care, and lean on him for counsel, could be fanned into a scandal for the whole world's delight. With and without Moray's prompting she had seen that before the Queen could be destroyed her reputation must be dragged in the dirt, but had never dared to hope she could be forced into the position of choosing such a one as Bothwell for her accomplice. Yet, as Moray from his safe retreat in England pointed out to her, that was exactly what she had done.

"You will see, Madam—Your Majesty will see!" he said to the eager Elizabeth. "In a year or less the Queen will be deposed, Bothwell hounded out of Scotland, the Prince in your hands to be brought up princely and in the true religion, and I the humble regent at your service and obedience."

But in these promises as in all else there was no truth in Moray. The Prince in Elizabeth's hands, never! Himself regent, yes! But king also as he strengthened, knowing the strength and weakness of England—her statesmen

corruptible or incorruptible—as Elizabeth could never know them. He was at the back of events in England as in Scotland, and knew Elizabeth's weaknesses and how the Cecils and Walsingham pulled her strings, as well as he knew Mary's. They let Elizabeth talk, but they moved her in the drama with strings she did not feel.

"The first act of the play is over, Madam," he told her, sitting in her luxurious little cabinet at Whitehall where the picture of her father (his great-uncle) stared down with his smooth broad face and rat-like eyes resembling Moray's own. In her moments of conciliation Elizabeth was willing to acknowledge the tie of cousinship between them though marred by his illegitimacy, but she never found herself wishing the bar sinister away, and he the true heir to her throne. He had managed his affairs in Scotland too astutely and successfully to be despised, and she hated subtlety except in those whose interests had made them wholly hers. But he was a bitter pill to her—bitter!

"And the second act—what of that?" she asked him.

He smiled: "The catastrophe will certainly be the third act, and in Your Majesty's gracious hands. But in the second you will find all the great events blending that will ensure it. The Lords are about to recommend that very worthy, noble and valiant gentleman the Earl of Bothwell for the Queen's new consort."

He looked at her smiling genially as he spoke, watching for the answering gleam in her eye. But for a moment he was disappointed. Even to Elizabeth that suggestion was horrible. She winced.

"The murderer!" she said and was silent, looking downward. No one knew better than she the threads of the conspiracy against Darnley's miserable life. She had known and approved them before ever the grim house at Kirk O'Fields was chosen. Yet there was a touch of horror in Moray's low words like that attending the mention of dark degenerate crimes only to be hinted at in secret places. For, let it be remembered, she also knew Mary's innocence. He felt her meaning and changed his tone instantly.

"The man was acquitted in the face of day. There are circumstances, Madam, which incline the Lords to think my Lord Bothwell the only possible consort for the Queen's

Majesty. She is not twenty-five and has not Your Majesty's powerful mind. She needs a man beside her and a strong one, and since she must be much in private with Bothwell as her minister it appears more seemly to the Scots people that he should be her husband."

"But she—will she—can she?" asked Elizabeth. A fan of feathers with jewelled handle lay in her lap. She took it up and looked at him over it, hiding her thin lips.

"Madam, in the strictest secrecy and with grief I must own that it is believed in Scotland both at court and abroad that the Queen has a passion for him, that has carried her to the uttermost not only now but in the late King's lifetime. My Lord Bedford had yesterday a letter from Sir William Kirkaldy, a worthy man and as true as truth's self, wherein he writes: 'The Queen is now so shamelessly enamoured of Bothwell that she has been heard to say she cares not whether she loses France, England and her own country, for she would go to the world's end in a white petticoat with him rather than lose him.' Being so, better marry her to him than see her shame herself and us for him. She is indeed transported by passion for the man."

Elizabeth dropped the fan uncertain how much was true —how much policy. She knew of her own knowledge that love of love, of vanity, and love's follies may carry a woman perilously far on the road of self-surrender. Yet she knew also that not a faintest shadow hitherto had ever rested upon the untrodden snow of the young Queen's reputation.

Startled, she asked as simply as any woman might: "But is it true, cousin, or—statecraft?"

Moray shook his head.

"True, Madam, the bitter, dolorous truth! And being so, it is necessary they should wed lest worse follow, especially as wed she must. There is only the Prince's life between us and dangers many and great and——"

"But a man like a villain in a play—" Elizabeth persisted, finding the human side of the story more interesting for the moment. "After all—what like is he?"

Moray shrugged his shoulders with a gesture learnt at the Court of France.

"Madam, my sister's taste is not delicate! As for his eloquence and beauty I need make no long tale of them.

They that have seen him can well remember his face, his bearing and the whole form of his one-eyed body, how gay it is! They that have heard him are not ignorant of his rude utterance and blockishness. It is not every woman whose fine discernment recognizes beauty and wit and worth."

The indirect compliment pleased her. Certainly none could accuse the dead and gone Seymour the lover of her girlhood, or Leicester or Hatton, of blockishness. Courtly men and mannered. Pah—the vile perverted taste of the Queen of Scotland!

"A fool must rush on destruction after his own fashion!" she said dryly; "but as Queen and woman I own I regret my good sister should deliver herself over to the world's ill opinion. I warned her in my letter that a frightful suspicion already attaches to her in all honest minds. If she weds this man, what can men say but that birds of a feather flock together? Thank God, we ourselves have judgment and discernment which can never stoop to the weakness it despises in others."

Moray bowed. Those two old hawks at the game understood one another so perfectly that there was almost enjoyment in playing it.

Meanwhile in Edinburgh Bothwell, growing more loud and boastful daily as he felt his power with Mary increase, had taken a step which he believed consolidated all his schemes in unmitigated success. His feet were sure on the step to the throne.

Parliament having confirmed him in his offices, he made a great feast for his friends and allies at a resort known as Ainslie's Tavern where the wine was fiery and the cooking good after the strong plentiful fashion which he preferred to any other. His purpose was good-fellowship and to flaunt his favour with the Queen in every man's face that all might realize Moray as a dead luminary sunk below the horizon and himself as the rising sun of influence and gift-giving.

They trooped to the supper—the great majority servants of Moray's acting on his prescribed orders. Bothwell was a tool and a fool, no more, to be humoured that he might be used. A few true friends of Mary's were among them bewildered by her favour to Bothwell, but bound in honour, as

they thought, to support him as far as they dared. She might know what they could not.

Argyll, the Justice General, who had lately tried Bothwell, was now his guest; Morton, Lethington and others biding their time; and the drinking grew fast and furious as jests merry and obscene circulated, and men's tongues were loosed.

None knew how it started, but as it seemed suddenly Argyll was on his legs shouting: "And if the Queen's Grace must wed as wed she must, it is the reasoned judgment of many gentlemen here present that the fittest—the only consort for her is that noble and valiant peer the Earl of Bothwell—a man to protect the throne, to unite us all in unity, to get us strong sons in case the Prince's life should fail. Those who are for the Earl of Bothwell, shout! Those who are not remain silent!"

A babel of shouting rose in the big tavern room. Cups were raised and drained. Men staggered to their feet yelling themselves hoarse. More than one lost his footing and rolled drunkenly under the table. Bothwell sat staring with a fixed smile, moving his face from one to the other with his one-eyed glance as the contagion spread. Another man sprang up behind his shoulder yelling against the noise, shaking a great paper in his hand.

"A bond, a bond, Lords and gentlemen! Bonds are the French fashion nowadays whether for murder or marriage. A bond! Hark—hush! Listen for a moment! A word with you all!"

Except for one remonstrant roar the noise ceased by magic. Bothwell dropped into his chair, still with a fixed meaningless smile. The man—it was a satellite of Moray's, held up his paper and read the contents in a loud monotonous tone.

"We the undersigned freely declare that James, Earl of Bothwell, Lord of Hailes and Liddesdale, Great Admiral of Scotland and Lieutenant of all the Marches, being calumniated by malicious reports and placards privily affixed by his enemies as art and part in the wicked murder of the King, late husband to the Queen's Majesty, has submitted to an assize, and been found innocent of the same by certain noblemen his peers. We the undersigned unite to defend and bear him harmless, and recommend the said Earl of

Bothwell as consort to our Sovereign Lady the Queen, pledging ourselves on our honour and fidelity not only to advance such a marriage betwixt Her Highness and the said noble lord with our votes and assistance, but in case any would presume to hinder or disturb the said marriage we shall hold the hinderers as our common enemies, and so shall fight and risk our lives as we shall answer to God upon our fidelities and conscience. And in case we do the contrary we shall never have reputation or credit but be accounted unworthy and faithless traitors."

He ended with : " God save Her Highness and the noble Earl of Bothwell ! " and flourished the paper, another man behind him yelling : " A good paper and for the peace of the State. Sign, sign, gentlemen all, for the Queen's sake and the realm's ! Health to my Lord Bothwell. Sign, sign ! "

In a moment twenty were shouting " Sign ! " some of them men who in their sober senses would have died sooner. The Earl of Eglinton and one or two more, liking neither their company nor the purport of the bond, glided noiselessly out at the back and were gone.

As to Bothwell, it flew to his brain like the strong drink of which he had swallowed his share and more. He was on his feet roaring out the great things he would do for those who signed.

" For I have the Queen's ear. She does nothing without my counsel and agreement. I have her in my hand ! He who seeks her favour must come in by my door. It is her wish and commandment that all sign this bond." And so forth.

In the storm of applause a man caught the bond from the holder's hand and signed with a flourish. Argyll, Huntley, Morton—they rained in signatures ; Glencairn, Rothes—none held back. Like cattle herding, in a common rush they surged in to sign until the paper was covered with twenty wild scrawling signatures. They all knew Bothwell was a married man, but shamelessly, treacherously, drunkenly, they signed, some shouting with laughter, one or two grave and bewildered. But done it was and Bothwell at last, falling heavily asleep in his chair, arms and head on the thick rough table, had stuffed in the bosom of his wine-stained doublet the paper with the Lords' proposal and approval of his marriage with the Queen.

Somewhat sobered next day, but with his brain still throbbing with drink he took it with him to Holyrood for his usual interview with her. She sat in a high *prie-dieu* chair, pale and slender in falling black robes, a black transparent veil in a sombre point between her eyebrows, a white *guimpe* covering her long throat severely, and meeting the delicate lift of her chin. She looked extraordinarily young, and frail as a flower with violet-petal stains under her eyes, her lips a faint coral. Beside her on a heavy oak table was a mass of papers and letters to be dealt with presently, too great a weight for a hand so slender. Mary Seton stood stiffly behind her chair, with eyes fixed on Bothwell like a bird who sees the fowler coming and cannot stir.

He made his salutations, then reared himself to his height and listened while she spoke of the letters. He was dressed with more attention than usual, and wore a rough chain of hammered gold about his neck. Mary, watching his coming with pleasure, admitted that in spite of his clumsy build and ugliness he looked a man—though a heavy broad-sword in place of the fine rapier of the courtier type she had known in France.

Her questions finished, he spoke still standing : " Madam, shall I ask Your Grace to dismiss this lady that I may speak in private of a most urgent matter proceeding before the Lords ? I have a paper——"

" Wait in the ante-room and send my secretary," the Queen said turning to Mary Seton with a look which warned: " Wait by the door." There was that in his manner which whispered to her quick sense two words : " On guard ! " But Bothwell intervened.

" Madam, this is so private that you will not yourself desire your secretary's presence until you shall hear. If after five minutes you desire him I will summon him."

Mary Seton slipped to the door melting through it and was gone. The light closing click sent a shudder through Mary. What could be good coming from the Lords ? Bothwell put the bond on the table and stood waiting, round-shouldered but strong as a pillar of granite.

She read and sprang to her feet.

" The insult ! The dastards ! But you flung it in their faces, my Lord ! You told them I would sooner die. You said——"

Perfectly silent, he stood motionless like a granite pillar storm-beaten with wild birds clanging about it.

Her voice wavered: "Die? I would be burnt alive!—I trusted you. I trust you. What have you done? I cannot follow nor understand. What is it? A plot?"

Still silent.

Her voice rose to a cry: "They are mad. They fly in the face of God. You have a wife. Am I dreaming? I charge you tell me the meaning and what you have done to protect me?"

He answered stolidly: "Madam, you are a Queen from the cradle. It is not now you learn that liking gives way to policy. The Lords taking all into consideration desire you to be wed and to no Popish prince—that having brought already great woe to you and the Kingdom. And they choose me as being a man sworn to your service and one of the Reformed Faith. Of myself in person I own myself unworthy, but a faithful servant, as Your Grace has agreed by your favour. Failing me they see no way but what will provoke the anger of England and Scotland."

"But—Mother of God!" she cried. "Am I mad? Your wife——"

"Madam, Your Grace will remember—she divorces me shortly."

It was clear even to his dull senses that this was no time for love or flattery. Repulsion, horror, spoke in her every gesture. He clenched his teeth on his lower lip—thinking that the dainty thing should pay dear for the white look of horror she cast at the door as if trembling to spring through it and escape, and it was with mastery he watched her slowly, forcibly, control herself and rein in her pride and scorn, lest she might lose her one faithful servant on God's earth.

She sank slowly into her chair again as if the tension had relaxed, and looked up at him with a sorry attempt at the old kindness as he stood four-square above her.

"My Lord, I ask your pardon if I have said one word discourteous. But you know you were but lately charged with my husband's foul murder, and though I know you for innocent as you yourself know it, still you were infamed before the world. I also am infamed, God forgive the slanderers! But this being so, were I to consent, it would

be said—oh how repeat the words!—the murderess marries the man for whom she murdered, he the hand and she the brain. Were you the only man left alive in the wide world I could not do this thing."

"Not by the counsel of all your Lords and Parliament, Madam?"

"Certainly not by the counsel of men I despise. And furthermore I am a Catholic. In my eyes you are your wife's husband till death do you part. With us marriage is a sacrament. Shall I fling it in the mud? While she lives hers you are."

"But if these two objections were lacking, is my person displeasant to you, Madam? I lay no claim to anything but manhood, but I have that. Does it displease you?"

Her last chance if she had known it for the soothing word—the woman's weapon of a gleam of hope as she runs to safety round the corner. Again she looked up at him directly—and with that look of innocent candid sweetness which put men beside themselves because she was out of reach.

"My Lord, I hold you in affection as the truest of my friends—and God knows I have few—as my kinsman. Is not that enough? To me it is much. But as a husband—no. Never. In any time or circumstance never."

He refolded the paper carefully and put it in his breast, holding himself in iron control.

"Then that ends it. I constrain no woman against her will; my Sovereign Lady least of all. It is forgotten. But I will ask Your Grace for delay in breaking your refusal to the Lords, for there will be anger and more, and the end cannot be foreseen."

"Willingly!" She caught at any means of pleasing him. "Take your own time but keep it secret. You are not angry, my Lord? You understand?"

She stretched a pleading hand. It appeared he did not see it.

He answered coolly: "Madam, your will is my law. How else? It will take more than that to break my love and loyalty. And doubtless you are right. I am not fit mate for a Queen, and there are plenty gay princes in Europe. And shall we get to business now? Shall I summon the lady?"

It wounded her that she should have wounded him. She could not have countenanced a thought so hateful and yet—she might have spoken more kindly and temperately. "Shall I never learn wisdom ?" she thought as she bent over the papers. Not even to Mary Seton until much later did she break the news. She would not set an honest man in a position of such bitter ridicule.

Then when he left she looked down as he kissed her hand.

"All is well between us, my Lord ?"

"All is well. What better than plain speaking, trust, and confidence ?" he answered.

The door closed.

A few weeks later Mary rode down to Stirling where her little son dwelt under the guardianship of the Earl of Mar, and spent a few brief hours with the infant on whose frail life there hung events that move kingdoms. Later she rode to Linlithgow on her way to Edinburgh, and there spent the night with a small attendance. Next day she mounted to ride to Edinburgh. Would it have stayed her if she could have read a letter which Drury the Englishman was writing there for a waiting messenger for England ?

> "On Monday last the Queen took her journey to Stirling to see the Prince, and some say she would be glad to recover him into her own keeping. This day she wills to return to Edinburgh or Dunbar. The Earl of Bothwell has gathered many of his friends very well armed ; some say to ride into Liddesdale—but it is feared there is some other purpose he intends very different from that, of which I believe I shortly shall be able to write more certainly. He has furnished Dunbar Castle with all necessary provisions of victuals and things for war."

No—she should not have distrusted him. In her mind the reserved and dignified manner (for so she considered it) in which he had borne her scornful rejection had confirmed her trust in him. Not a word of reproach or even of pain. So brave men take defeat, if indeed he considered it defeat, or had ever in his heart desired so monstrous a thing. She

meditated a letter to Lady Bothwell later when she should be freer to speak, a letter striving to make the peace between her and a husband who certainly had faults difficult for a wife to pardon, yet comprehensible to those who valued his rugged virtues.

So musing in the intervals of her longing thoughts of "the dearest jewel," her child, she rode slowly towards Edinburgh with her little following of twelve persons. Such awe had Bothwell's policing struck into the freebooters and lawless men that the roads were safe enough now—and for her especially whose royal face was known from north to south. She felt the safer also for Moray's absence. Let him brew mischief with Elizabeth as he would! Bothwell would keep both him and the Lords in check. Late events had proved that he must have a powerful party indeed among them, for she had noted that Lords of her own party as well as of Moray's had signed that hateful bond of marriage.

A whirl, a rush of galloping hoofs, a troop of horsemen not less than a thousand, riding at full speed down the Foulbriggs road—in haste, hot haste! It was his duty as High Sheriff to see her safe along the roads, and he should have met her sooner—but the haste! She reined up, fearful of some alarm, as Bothwell bore down upon her galloping hell for leather.

Did he speak—shout? Did she hear a cry of: "Danger! Halt!"—and again: "Ride, ride for Dunbar Castle!"

In the confusion she believed this, yet was not certain. All she knew was that he caught her bridle-rein, his men closed round her and they were riding like the wind, not to Edinburgh but down the road to Dunbar. He leaned aside to speak to her.

"Danger, Madam! A plot! Ride swiftly. Dunbar Castle is armed and provisioned. You are safe if we can reach it. God send we may!"

He waved his sword and shouted to the galloping thunder of the men about him.

"For Dunbar. For the Queen! Ride, ride! A Bothwell! A Bothwell! Ride. Liddesdale lads for the Queen!"

She rode with all her strength keeping up with them gallantly. The staring people scattered here and there marvelled to see the Queen ride so madly with Bothwell's

troopers about her—riding until in night and starlight the black towers of a castle cut huge gaps in the stars, the portcullis creaked upward, the drawbridge fell, and they rode into the courtyard of his castle of Dunbar.

CHAPTER XX

IT was not till she had dismounted, and Bothwell preceding her offered his hand to lead her up the winding stone stair to the great hall, that doubt began to steal into Mary's heart with the cold chill which is the dawn of enlightenment. Danger? And from the Lords—but what? Where? Had the troopers swept up Mary Seton who rode behind her as they neared Edinburgh? She turned sharply on that as they reached the stone passage debouching into the withdrawing-room.

"Where is Mary Seton?"

Bothwell looked over his shoulder.

"Surely she came, Madam. My thoughts were on you for the Lords were after us."

"Send and see!" Mary ordered imperiously. She was irritable with fatigue, and the thought of solitude with Bothwell whipped her into anger which was half fear. He called a brief direction to the man on the stair below and put out his hand for hers again. She kept it to herself and followed, meditating cold and stately displeasure which should freeze him at requisite distance while she inquired into the matter.

Leading the way now she walked stiffly into the great hall or withdrawing-room used by the ladies of the castle for pleasure and recreation when they met their men in leisure hours. Some straight-backed chairs in faded velvet and leather stood round the walls which were partly clothed with time-worn tapestry. There was a great table and no more. The bare stone floor resounded to Bothwell's feet as he followed her in and out of the light and dark of narrow windows, to one which overlooked the wide country beneath. A chair with armorial bearings stood near it, and she seated herself in this, thinking: "I am more royal seated while he stands. It will hearten me," and so fixed him with a penetrating look.

"My Lord Bothwell, I have trusted you. Justify me! Tell me why you snatched me from my guard, and why we have ridden like the wind to your castle of Dunbar?"

He stood before her unafraid, unashamed, heavy, immovable and answered briefly: "Danger, Madam. The Lords. They desire to secure your person and imprison you in Lochleven Castle. That Castle is on an island in the midst of a lake. Your jailer would be a jealous woman, Lady Douglas, Moray's mother whom your mother dispossessed. Judge if she loves you! In this my poor house comfort is scanty but there is freedom, for you are under my word, and can leave it when you judge it safe. Thus, if I have done wrong I ask your pardon with a clear conscience."

To Mary this assertion carried conviction. She knew well that Lochleven Castle was the fate Moray had prepared for her. She knew the bitter vindictive temper of her father's paramour. She knew were such a doom threatened, Bothwell must have acted as he had done if there were any hope of saving her. Her hovering doubt relaxed a little.

"If this is true—have you proof?"

"Madam, if my word needs proof I have it."

He laid in her hand a paper soiled, crumpled, from where he had pushed it into his iron-clad breast beneath the breastplate.

"These are to warn my Lord Morton that by the Earl of M's command all is prepared for the Queen's coming to Lochleven. We judge she will sup there on the Friday."

"The Friday!" she said with a beating heart. "And this is Thursday. If I had ridden to Holyrood— My Lord, you have proved your truth again and yet again. I thank you. I bless you. It is you always who come when my fate is darkest and deliver me as St. George did the captive princess."

Bothwell took this reception of his forgery in sullen silence. It galled him that he should be distrusted even when most he deserved it. He resented her haughty look and anger as he never would have resented it, had she been mistaken. She believed only that she had wounded his blunt honesty, and rising laid a hand on his gauntleted one.

"My Lord Bothwell, you can hold no anger against me! Remember what I have borne—what treachery and cruel usage. To me it could never seem impossible that any should turn against me, and it is truth that the rewards I have to offer for fidelity grow smaller daily. But you are true, and so being I will own to you that I grieve to my soul that deadly necessity brought me here. Consider! I am charged with part in my husband's murder. So are you. The Lords in their last bond for my ruin desired my marriage with you, which if I accepted would stamp me for ever with the brand of murder as supplying a reason for my desiring it. And now, much against my will, I am driven to ride with you to your castle of Dunbar and there abide. My good name is gone—I shall be known as a murderess and wanton that fled with you of her own free choice—fled to your castle of Dunbar. And you a man much spoken of with women. It is a very deadly plight for me. Therefore you will forgive despair which has the voice of anger."

"Madam, I do forgive—if you will have a subject's pardon. But there was neither time nor choice. I would have taken you elsewhere but knew not whom to trust. Your true Lord Herries signed the marriage bond that angered you. So also did my Lord Seton, kin to your trusted woman. Whom can you trust? For my part I know not—except it be the despised Bothwell."

She dropped back into her chair wearied out, and answered very low: "Nor I either. It seems all are against me. Yet I have lost my reputation. Here in your castle of Dunbar who will believe me an honest woman? It will give deadly handle to the Lords—and to the Queen of England. Lord, have pity on me!"

"Madam, I am sorry. I wish better could have been or I more innocent of women. But a few days will free you, and you can then forget poor Bothwell and his windy castle."

It was a cold April, and the chilly draughts blowing along the floor and through the crannies of the ancient windows chilled the blood in her veins as much as the admission he made which recalled his evil reputation with women to her trembling recollection. With what terrible ease a false colouring could be given to her mad ride with him in the

face of the countryside! If the Lords denied their guilt could she prove it? O, for Mary Seton and her brave heart and true eyes to consider and give her heart and hope!

An armed man appeared at the door, saluting Bothwell.

"My Lord, no lady rode with us."

Bothwell turned snarling on him.

"You had orders to bring Her Majesty's two ladies."

"My Lord, not I. I cannot say for the others, but no lady rode with us."

Bothwell hurled his sword at him. It struck his shoulder and fell clattering on the stone pavement. The man picked it up and advanced to present it to his master, but Mary stepped between. She had recovered her dignity in that moment of extreme need—knowing now that on herself and herself only must be her dependence.

"My Lord, this is my castle of Dunbar as every castle in Scotland is mine, and I will have no brawling in the Queen's presence. Go, man! You have said your say."

As he went she turned to Bothwell, he standing with his head dropped bull-like between his shoulders in his characteristic attitude—staring at the ground.

"Mary Seton would never have left me—no, not if she followed barefoot. What this means I do not know, but if she has had misusage Scotland shall ring with it! Are there no wives of these men in my castle who can wait upon me? It is my custom to be surrounded with women, and women I will have. Who is here?"

He stuttered in answering, as was his habit when moved and startled.

"Madam, you shall have women's attendance. I never supposed otherwise. There is my sister, widow to Lord John Stuart of Coldingham, therefore your own sister-in-law, and her son is your nephew and mine."

"I desire her presence now," Mary said eagerly, struggling to remember what she had known of her sister-in-law beyond the fact that she had been little more than a lay-figure at Court revels—a small pale-faced, pink-eyed ferret of a woman exceedingly reserved and secret, who had slipped out of her life entirely after the early death of John Stuart less than two years after his marriage. So this was where she had been, lonely and perhaps grieving, in the

stern castle of Dunbar! Her face softened as she waited for her, remembering the brilliant young John Stuart who had loved life so dearly and had had so brief a taste of its sweetness.

She came in preceding Bothwell and carrying a guttering candle which she set on the table; small, white-faced, crouching, smothered in black with a furtive eye over her shoulder at her hulking brother, and so dropped on one knee at Mary's feet. She raised and embraced her affectionately.

"It is years since we met, sister, and life has not been gentle either to you or to me. But I am glad we shall now for a little time be together. I desire you will not leave me night or day, sleeping in my chamber in place of Mary Seton."

"Madam, every wish of Your Grace's is law to me but that I cannot do. My boy Francis has the scarlet fever, and I must be with him night and day for he has no nurse-carer but myself. I should not now be with Your Highness."

Mary stared at the mean sharp little face. Always it had been a marvel to her that her brother John should have wedded Bothwell's sister—homely as himself—though after a very different fashion. She suggested the insipid ugliness of the coarse-leafed nettle with its pale imperceptible flower and the threat of a sting behind. This refusal was unendurable. She would not plead. She would command—a thing very foreign to her kindly heart.

"I am sorry indeed that little Francis is sick, but of contagion I have no fear. I desire you will bring him to my room, sister. I will help you to care for him."

"Madam, I would not risk Your Grace's precious health, and it is besides impossible, for I will not peril my child by removing him from a warm room along the windy passages. If you should need me I can be summoned. Have I your leave to return to him?"

There was more than the hint of a sting in her sharp-edged refusal. It recalled to Mary the possibility that in Dunbar Castle she might not be Queen however she claimed Queendom. She drew herself up to her willowy height and looked down on the creature from under her lashes.

"Go, if you will, and send me your woman. I claim her services."

"I also, Madam, for my Francis is in danger. She fetches and carries for me," the small widow said doggedly, baring her teeth for conflict. "I cannot tell why you are here with my brother without maid or wife to countenance you, but my Francis shall not die. I appeal to all Scots mothers when this story gets known, as known it will. Were you in Holyrood you would have attendance. But you have come here."

It was the first time Mary had been insulted by any woman. It was not to be the last, and as if in a foreseeing of that bitterness it struck her mute for the moment. Seeing her advantage the widow turned and made for the door cautiously like a mouse skirting the wainscot at the sight of the cat. Mary turned dangerously to Bothwell.

"Before she goes bid her send any woman in the castle—be she who she may."

The widow turned at the door and curtsied.

"There is no other. I bid Your Majesty farewell."

She was gone.

Food was brought, Bothwell waiting on the Queen with his own hands. She ate mechanically with the thought that food would give her strength for escape if escape offered. The woman's words had brought home to her with horror fresh perception of her evil case—of what the Edinburgh fishwives would be cackling to each other over their unsavoury wares.

"The Queen is fled with Bothwell. She cannot do without a man—not she! The King died in February and this is but April. Maybe she did not wait till now. French fashion! The wanton—the wanton!"

And the Lords: "She could not wait though we prescribed her marriage. A woman over-eager indeed!" And the goatish laughter of Morton and Ruthven and the rest.

She turned suddenly on Bothwell who stood behind her with a plate of small cakes—so violently—that she dashed the plate from his hand and did not know it.

"There was no danger—no death I would not have faced sooner than this! I am a ruined woman. I will not say it was a trap——"

He interrupted her fiercely.

"A trap? You had best not, Madam. A man needs

must have patience with a woman's fleers, but you go too far. I have saved your life, and God knows may have reason to wish I had not, if the Lords storm the castle. I would have you remember they urged our marriage. The next thing they will desire is my head. And you talk of traps!"

To her this could not but wear the face of rough and cruel truth. After all, what had he to gain—and all his world of ambition to lose? The word had slipped from her but she did not believe it herself. With the softened light in her eyes for which men easily forgive she laid her hand on his arm light as thistledown.

"My Lord, you did not wait to the end. I said I did not think it a trap—but none the less my name is ruined. To-night I will wake and think what is best for me. It may be to ride to the nearest sea-port and take boat for France, for there is no more for me in Scotland. Let someone take me to my bed-chamber for I am weary to death. We will speak again to-morrow."

Bothwell blew his whistle. A young page, strange bed-chamber attendant for the Queen, led the way for her, and Bothwell remained standing alone in the great gusty room, his looks bent on the floor. She thought him ashamed and suffering for his own cruelty of speech, dumb as usual when any delicacy of feeling needed expression. Forgetting him she turned at her door before the page left her, to ask where the widow hid herself and her son.

He answered briefly: "Up the stairs—high up, Madam," and vanished.

But Bothwell going by winding stairs and passages into a distant chamber opened the door upon Lethington, and sat himself sullenly down before the silver-tongued liar of the Lords. Lethington smiled, looking up from the jack of wine that stood before him.

"How goes your other prisoner, my Lord? Your men have treated me well here with wine and mutton of the best. And how many kisses have you to count over to me?" he said.

There were two reasons for Lethington's presence as a captive in Dunbar. One, that any deeds executed there might bear the Great Seal which could only be affixed by the Secretary of State; the other that the clumsy bull's

brain of Bothwell should be directed if possible by the *finesse* of one of the keenest in Scotland. Bothwell had accepted the condition—indeed as Elizabeth and her ministers knew beforehand of the whole transaction—he could not refuse. But it irked him, and he sat dumb and sullen when they met, filling himself silently with wine while Lethington watered his and tried to play the part of a boon companion. But even Lethington's face paled a little and his flow of talk and jest stopped, when late in the night and without a word Bothwell rose, half mad with wine and his thoughts, and went out silently and abruptly shutting the door behind him. For Lethington knew that a deed to make the world's ears ring was afoot. That night he did not sleep.

The Queen's room was a beamed chamber—the rough stone walls hung with tattered arras—and some attempt had been made at comfort. A large state bed was hung with sombre velvet, and a *prie-dieu* stood beside it. Night-clothes—she supposed the widow's—lay on a table near the fire, and the page had left two candles alight with store of others to replenish them. That was all, but enough. She barred the heavy door, tried a small one hidden under the arras and found it locked and the key absent, and unknotting her hair put on the night robe, with a shudder at its owner, and sat by the fire stretching her cold bare feet to its warmth that she might compose her mind sufficiently for prayer, for as she was accustomed to say: "He who approaches the Divine should do it with at least as much calm and reverence as are exacted from those who approach an earthly Sovereign."

Her plight was desperate. Apparently it was impossible to make Bothwell understand its terrors. It was as though his mind was labouring with some problem of its own which absorbed all his energies. She was not even certain he had heard her. Well as she knew him this mood was new, and filled her with extravagant terrors of the cares he was considering so deeply. Her own were overwhelming, and the murderous shocks of Riccio's and Darnley's murders had left her panic-stricken with shadowy dreads. Plots of the Lords and Elizabeth—endless vistas of terror. Would Mary Seton rouse the Setons and the land to help her? What would Herries do? And still her brain wove the

tangled web with new terrors, until gradually and quietly in the warmth of the fire, and the flickering lights and shadows, sleep softened the harsh outlines. They blurred, they faded to a floating dream. She drifted away on gliding wings to the Queen's garden at Chenonceaux.

Roses—roses exhaling perfume in slumberous sunshine warm as a lover's kiss. Drowsy light, the distant sound of happy voices. Chastelard's lute, the voice of Ronsard reciting, as long ago. Stay! He was sitting at her feet. Did he speak, or did she read it from his moving lips in an exquisite dream of youth and bliss? His voice murmured through her memory:

I saw the Scottish queen so fair and wise
  She shone divine, descended from the skies.
Near to her eyes I drew, two radiant spheres,
  Twin suns of beauty shining without peers.
I saw them dimmed as flowers with raindrops clear
  And trembling on their lids a crystal tear,
Remembering France, her sceptre, and the day
  When her first love passed like a dream away.

She remembered France daily and those beloved verses, but now no need to remember; she lived again in that calm Paradise. Was it Mary Seton at her shoulder smiling—smiling so young and happy that—Was it France, or could it be God's own Paradise with the gates locked against all grief and fear, and golden angels with golden lutes in hand and rose-garlanded heads, moving like flames across grass enamelled with no earthly flowers? God's peace in golden-calm of sunshine on flowing waters. Music fading into sweeter distance. She smiled in dreaming. All memory exceeded, most dear, most desirable.

A crash. Hell breaking in on heaven in black ruin. A man clinging about her knees. Ronsard? No, as her lids flashed upward—Bothwell—his face livid with brutal passion, pressing his lips upon her bare arms, her throat, the ghastly pallor of her lips and cheeks. She staggered as she stood, and he caught her in an embrace that made them one for a moment of horror. She shrieked to God wildly at his madness, like the cry of a trapped dog. He stifled her cries with a brutal hand about her throat. No thought

of God's deliverance flamed in her, he panting at her ear.

"No one is near—not a soul to hear, and you are mine. You would not but you shall. You shall crawl to me for a wedding-ring to hide your shame. No Queen to-night but a woman, and I am a man and a strong one. If I murder you I will have my will."

He shook her to and fro in iron hands. After that not a word. She struggled like a mad woman, like a dying one in the grip of the fore-taste of hell—desperately, silently, with clenched teeth that cut her lip, flinging, thrusting, tearing, with a strength that seemed to herself irresistible. How long that eternity lasted she could not tell. She caught at his throat with fury, a wild beast, and drove her nails into it and, maddened, saw blood follow them and thirsted for more. He dashed his clenched fist into her bare breast in a spasm of hate, brute beast, no man, and at that cruel blow her strength broke suddenly under her and was gone in a mist of agony. She swung aside and dropped on the floor. Her last prayer was: "Death."

Had it been death she had been most happy.

When dawn stole into the narrow window as if shaming to see the Queen's shame it touched her eyelids with so bitter a chill that she woke shivering and dazed, unconscious for a moment of all but cruel pain in her breast, and limbs stiff with cold and suffering; pain immitigable. A cloak covered her, no pillow propped her head, she lay like a weed flung out on the road to die. Slowly she drew herself up on one elbow and looked about her for an answer to her bewilderment. Bothwell lay asleep at the bed's foot, his mouth gaping, one hairy arm flung out over the purple cover, ungainly, bestial—a world's shame. Memory rushed, flashed, broke into her brain with frantic illumination. She sprang from the dreadful room shrieking to God, to man, as she ran, and so to the widow's door beating upon it like a thing possessed, her hands bruised and bleeding on the dumb panels. For there was none that answered nor any that regarded.

And so Bothwell found her lying, again senseless, and lifting carried her to the bed and laid her on it, and forced wine through her locked teeth, and then left her to herself, with men to watch the door and tell him when she spoke or

moved. She must not die or his head would be the forfeit. His own brain dizzied between fear and triumph.

When she could move she crawled to the window. Would Herries, would Seton, raise Scotland for her lost Queen? No—men had seen her riding of her own will with the ruffian. All would believe—and the Lords rejoice to believe and spread the news that she had fled with Bothwell. She was ruined body and soul. No way out of it—none in heaven or hell. Held up to the world as murderess, wanton and fool: her reign ended, her life with it. Life! She looked about the room for some means to end it. None; even Death withheld his mercy. She could not force her body through one of the narrow windows which darkened rather than lightened the room, and so crash in the court-yard a bloody mass, hideous but released, done with this spectral dance of daily horror after horror. It may be her mind wandered a little in that day and night in which no one came near her, though hands invisible pushed food that she could not touch into the room. No help from out-side. No gallant lances and floating pennons topped the hill, no Seton war-cry, no rush of Mary Seton's loving feet. What wonder? Who would pity a creature fallen from so high an estate to the ruffian amours of Bothwell? Now too late she saw his bluff candour and rough honesty for what they were. A trap for a trusting believing fool—deserving such cheating and his mockery.

Next day, possibly judging her tamed by pain and desolation, he came walking in like a freebooter upon his prize and sat down before her. He had resumed the rough soldier manner which had once given her confidence and now—but she dared not think into her thoughts. They must be skirted tremblingly like a dark wood where man-eaters and devils lurk. She shut her eyelids on them and on him, as he spoke his will like a conqueror.

"It is needful we should have some talk, and time will wait no longer. I spare ceremony now you are mine, and come to the point. First—of the outer world. There has been no stir made for your deliverance and there will be none. The Lords will assert it was your own will to be with me, and I shall support them. The only way of redemption for yourself is to assent to their will and mine for our marriage. You refused it, but I have had my will of you

none the less, and with your will or without—we wed. With my sword and the Lords you are still Queen of Scotland. Without, a disgraced woman cast out by all. Your son will be shamed in your very name. Therefore consider. I am still willing to wed you. My wife's divorce is near finished and I shall be a free man. I wait your decision. Best kiss and take me for your man, for true man I will be if you behave yourself as a wise woman."

She said the one word: "True!" and was silent. Presently: "Give me leave to consider for an hour."

He rose and went.

Useless to detail her thoughts. Her story unravels them. At the end of an hour he returned to where she sat like a dead woman, even the beauty crushed out of her for the time, pale lips drawn over her teeth like a corpse's. She spoke, however, clearly if low.

"I consent to your and the Lords' decision for my marriage."

His face brightened with triumph.

"That is well chosen. And now to business. Lethington is here. My outposts caught him riding gay and gallant with six men, and I made him prisoner. He being State Secretary will hold a Privy Council, and you shall declare your assent and that you are here of your own free will. All can then go forward merry as a marriage bell."

She winced, a scarlet blush staining her cheek, and said: "I will not see him."

"No need. He will act with me for that is the Lords' will. Praise be we caught him, and a few others of the Council."

He went off laughing to Lethington to plan the Privy Council, and boasting and triumphant told him of the Queen's utter subjection.

"And well it was we planned, you and I, that you should hide in Dunbar, for this ruse of the Privy Council will satisfy all Scotland and England that she chose to visit her Lord Admiral and to take him for husband. It was well planned. Was it not, man of many words? Better with women to act than to vapour, eh?"

"Indeed, yes," Lethington answered smiling graciously. "You are not only a great fighting man but a great lover, my Lord. You have out-distanced us and stolen a march

that history will remember. Well—I drink to your merry marriage and a bold son to inherit your honours—for honours will rain upon you. And now for the Privy Council, and my letter with yours to tell Moray the joyful news."

"That letter I shall wish to see!" Bothwell said jealously. Lethington rubbed his hands with unction.

"And why not? You are in all our counsels. Who would dare to wag a finger against the King of Scotland?"

By next day the Privy Council held at Dunbar had declared to the world that the Queen had taken up her residence there, and had there held a Privy Council transacting the business of the realm in perfect freedom of will and person. Lethington's letter to Moray was submitted to Bothwell's eager eyes, and it was with triumph that he saw the armed messenger depart with his precious missive. Moray would own that abduction a master-stroke, one that he had once himself tried and failed. The Lord Admiral did not know that he carried another in Lethington's most secret cipher to the effect that the bull had walked into the trap, and they had got him noosed, and with him all his dangerous secrets when once the marriage should be safely made. For Mary, her connexion with him would end not only her political life but her natural one if so they determined. For Bothwell, forcible abduction of the Queen and "ravishment of her most noble person," as the Lords were to style it, would constitute high treason and earn him a hundred deaths. If Lethington ever triumphed and gladdened in his cold heart, it was as Bothwell's prisoner at Dunbar. To the skilled eye checkmate was certain, though a few final moves remained. On leaving, he beckoned Bothwell aside.

"Hasten your divorce in both courts, Protestant and Catholic. Leave no loophole. And now that this consent of hers is made known to the world bring her swiftly to Edinburgh. You must not have the appearance of keeping her prisoner."

"For sure!" Bothwell said eagerly. "But I can have it as I will. She will be as meek as any wife beside her spinning-wheel now. Yes, to Edinburgh!"

Lethington made a coarse jest about the air of Dunbar being a cure for women's coquetries, and rode off waving

his hand as Bothwell turned back to the castle, resolving he would not risk his prisoner at Holyrood where she might make some wild bid for freedom. It would be Edinburgh Castle, strong, guarded, and the castellan a partisan of his own.

CHAPTER XXI

SO with the bride's door guarded by armed men in Edinburgh Castle, and the late wife newly divorced, the Lords met again—under Moray's eager instigation from behind the shelter of Elizabeth's throne—to sign a second bond to the effect that : " This marriage between the Queen and the Earl of Bothwell is very suitable, he having as friends a great party in the Lothians and on the Border."

For still they dreaded the escape of their double prey, and the failure of the marriage which was to dethrone her and place Scotland at the feet of the English Queen.

They had no need for fear. Mary was broken for the time ; her high heart sunk in passive misery. Sick at heart and sick in body she still lifted no hand to sign the necessary contract for the marriage, and Bothwell in furious anxiety lest he should break his peace with the Lords, commanded that the declaration of marriage should be made between them in the great church of St. Giles, and there struck a most alarming and unexpected obstacle. For the official, Craig, who should read it, refused with indignation unless he should have the Queen's own warrant.

" And where is the warrant, for surely I know if you had it you would have brought it in your hand ? " was his only answer to Bothwell's cousin Hepburn who came with the message.

" I have none," he answered reluctantly.

" Then I will not," answered Craig. " And this I tell you plainly, for the rumour is everywhere that my Lord has ravished her and keeps her in captivity. Not a word from me, Mr. Hepburn, without the Queen's handwriting ! "

The next day Hepburn brought a writing signed by the Queen, with her commandment that the banns should be proclaimed, and with a sore heart Craig proceeded to the proclamation—making at the same time solemn protest

against the marriage and calling the assembly as witnesses that he was an unwilling instrument. In the great stir this provoked, Bothwell, seeing he must produce the Queen at all hazard, took her to the Court of Session, where pale and rigid she now openly declared herself at liberty, and sealed her disgrace in the eyes of all decent men and women—with black Bothwell scowling beside her—a shame to be seen!

Why? Mary Seton asked herself that question with agony not to be spoken. She had been restored to Mary's service on the return to Holyrood which soon took place, for even in Edinburgh Castle Bothwell dared not keep her women from the Queen, and there were times when he could not oversee their intercourse though he viewed it with hatred. He foresaw the moment when Mary Seton would fling herself at the Queen's feet and implore the truth of that frightful captivity at Dunbar, and then bearing the news to the loyal Setons set their hearts aflame with fury. He could see Lord Seton's name withdrawn from the marriage bond, with others of the great nobles following him if the Queen's agony were made known. And he believed she would speak her mind to Mary Seton.

But it was not so. Could Mary Seton ever forget the day when at last she flung herself at Mary's feet and kissing her hands in frantic love and pity implored her for the truth, that she might send it out like wild-fire to kindle the wrath of Scotland! Had she expected the old dauntless courage, the resolute effort for freedom, the old gaiety in danger's teeth? There was nothing of that now. The Queen sat still and white as death, her hand lay passive against those warm lips. Her eyes, like those of a woman tranced, stared at some horror visible to her only.

To all entreaties she answered only: "I love you, Mary Seton. That is not changed, but all else is changed. Ask me no more. I have no word to say. The marriage must be."

To touch the wound made Mary Seton tremble, yet having heard frightful rumours she did not shrink. Rather, they fired her with steadfast resolution to make a more desperate bid for confidence.

"Madam, may I speak plainly?"

"Useless. But speak if you will."

"Then, Madam, it is said you were brought to a pass

worse than any death at the castle of Dunbar—a shame not to be spoken—a horror in all men's eyes."

"It is true." Mary spoke almost indifferently, twisting the rings about her thin fingers.

"Then, Madam," (a pause, and the outburst) "O Mary Stuart, you and I have spoken of such things in happier days, and you said—and I loved you when you said it: 'A woman's honour cannot be touched by man's brutality. It is not seduction but murder, and she who pardons her murderer by taking his ring and swearing faith to him, what can she hope for but daily murder at the hands of a ruffian?' You said it and it is God's truth. Why then now break your own word? He could not touch you. He could not touch the Queen's honour. If he murdered you, rise from the dead, and call Scotland to arms to avenge you. Fear neither him nor the Lords. Make your wrongs a trumpet blast to arms."

Her eyes were wet with noble emotion, yet the fire in them burnt them dry and might have kindled the blood of a corpse. It did not Mary Stuart's. She stared at her dully.

"Talk is not deed. There are horrors beyond man's guessing, Mary Seton. Let me be. Yet a word for you and you only. Suppose the Queen of Scotland should bear a bastard to a villain—what then? Would you still say: 'No marriage!'—with all the world to see?"

Shuddering, Mary Seton hid her face in her hands, and neither at that time nor any other threw her body between the Queen and the dreadful day.

Moving as one in a dream Mary obeyed Bothwell in all things. Now that the divorce was pronounced between him and his wife, his present title no longer fitted his ambition as the Queen's husband. He told her his will roughly.

"If you will not come near me," she said, "you shall be what you will. What is it?"

"Duke of Orkney!" he stuttered, and she smiled a dreadful smile remembering Darnley's claim to be Duke of Albany and later King of Scotland. Well, let him! It appeared that his foul success had maddened him. He swaggered about the Court boasting like a barbarian, and talking so obscenely that men seasoned in a time none too delicate left him to himself in disgust. And still she had

not signed the contract. It was as though some influence withheld her hand though she knew it must be done. Not till the night before the day fixed for the marriage could he drag it from her, and then only by a base threat.

"This is your last chance. If it is not taken, I will throw you to the Lords. I will tell all the world that you planned the abduction that you might enjoy my company in safety at Dunbar, and I will fling the marriage ring in your face and leave Edinburgh this night for England to set it aflame against you. And then—mark you this—the Lords will seize your son! It is only I who can keep him with you. To have him is my interest as yours."

That broke her, and such reason as was left her abetted him. Silently she signed, then turned to him.

"One thing I ask, and if not granted you get no more of me—not if I am driven to stab myself with my own hand. Not if my son dies with me. At the marriage to-morrow there shall be no priest of my own church. . . ."

He stared at her in blank amazement. He had dreaded that point, being sure it was one she would not yield by a hair. No marriage would be marriage to her without her Church's blessing. His gladness passed quickly into suspicion.

"And why?"

"No matter. Remember this—it must be a minister of your own Church. If there is one of mine I will not live to see another day. You do not know me—yet."

He agreed. The Mass would have been an insuperable difficulty for him though her resolution raised all his fears. She relapsed into silence.

Next day on the fifteenth of May, little more than three months after Darnley's murder, in the hall at Holyrood and not in the chapel, was made the marriage between Mary Stuart and Bothwell at four o'clock in the morning without any such pleasures or pastimes as are used at the marriage of princes. The pale bride wore the sweeping black robes of a widow, the black veil drawn to a point between the brows and hiding all but the milk-white oval of her face, the whiter for the gloom about it. Few were present. The kindly du Croc, the French Ambassador, had utterly refused his presence, and so with others who would have surrounded her had the bridegroom been other than black Bothwell the

Bull. But the Englishman was present to exult and felicitate and write the joyful news afterwards to Cecil, with the addition that: "The Queen is the most changed woman in face that in so little time I have ever seen without extremity of sickness." It was said indeed that she went to the altar like a dead woman.

She sent for du Croc next day—her last link with France—a vision seen now as hopeless as life across the waters of death, yet unspeakably dear. He, prepared with some empty compliment, felt it die on his lips, and saw her changed face with alarm he could not hide. She lifted her head and looked him full and tragically in the eyes, careless of Bothwell's presence.

"You must not be surprised, monsieur, if you see me sorrowful. Never again shall I rejoice—my good days are done. All I desire—and that most earnestly—is death. Pray for me for death."

She spoke in French which Bothwell understood from his stay in France, and in great anger he took her by the arm and led her forcibly to her cabinet, du Croc standing in fixed alarm and Erskine the Captain of the Guard beside him, both staring at the door ajar.

A wild shriek from within.

"Go—go or I shall slay myself! O, for a knife, a knife! And if you lock all weapons from me I will run by night and drown myself in the first six inches of water I find. Go!"

The door shut violently and they heard no more. Du Croc crept away to write to Catherine the French Queen-Mother.

> "They tell me that unless God aids it is feared she will become desperate. I have counselled and comforted her all I can. Her husband will not continue so long. I believe he will write to Your Majesty by the Bishop of Dumblane; you ought not to make him any answer."

But she, now the marriage was made, and her honour so far safe-guarded, wrote passionately through her envoy at Rome to the highest authority under God, the only one from whom she could hope remission of the death sentence of marriage she had been compelled to pronounce upon

herself—the one to whom she clung, the one power which she would not profane in her marriage—the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff sitting enthroned in the Vatican. Would he incline his ear to the despairing petition of a royal daughter of the Church Catholic?

> "Tell to his Holiness the grief we suffered when we were made prisoner by the Earl of Bothwell and led as prisoner with the nobleman our Secretary to the Castle of Dunbar and after to the Castle of Edinburgh, where we were detained against our will by the said Earl until such time as he had procured a pretended divorce between him and his wife our near relative, and we were constrained to yield our consent, yet not our will. Therefore your Holiness is supplicated to take order on this, that we are made quit of the said indignity by means of a process at Rome and a commission sent to Scotland to the Bishops and other Catholic judges. Seeing ourselves left alone, as it were a prey to him, many things we revolved in our mind but could never find a way out. In the end, when we saw no hope to be rid of him, never man in Scotland making any effort to procure our deliverance, for it seemed by their signatures that he had won them all, we were compelled to mitigate our displeasure and think upon what he had proposed."

She wrote secretly to the Earl of Mar commanding him to deliver the Prince to no one but herself under any pretence, until she should see how things would go with Bothwell—now her last hope—and then having done all in her power resigned herself to what endurance was possible of him, of his constant guard, and of a nature "so beastly and suspicious" (in Melville's words) "that not a day passed but he caused her to shed an abundance of salt tears."

But the time was now ripe for the Lords to strike. England and Elizabeth were ready also, and the first storm-signal was hoisted in the Queen's own chamber at Holyrood, where Lethington the smooth spy of Moray and England held a conference with her.

Bothwell entered raging, someone of the Hepburns having

more than hinted to him where Lethington's true interests lay. Lethington could have reassured him, for it was impossible for him to believe the Lords would not back the King of Scotland, but in the opinion of Elizabeth the need for clever handling was now past and Lethington drew back with a sneer that set Bothwell flaming.

"Talk no more with that fawning villain, Madam," he shouted to Mary, drawn dagger in hand. "And be wary in speech for every word goes to England, and you and I stand in that Queen's danger if you tell him a thought beyond what you would publish at the Market Cross."

But much to his consternation, Lethington, the man of peace, drew his own dagger smartened with jewels, and called to him to come on with a plague upon him for a ruffianly scoundrel! Mary in terror threw herself between them, and Lethington walked off jauntily. Next day he fled to the Lords. The gage of battle was thrown down in public.

Mary was past caring. The Pope made no move. France lifted no finger to help her. The world believed or pretendeb to believe she had been a willing associate of the arch-criminal. She did not move a finger when he burst into her cabinet with the news that a little while ago would have stirred her to spirited resistance.

"Up and away, wife. The Lords design to take you from my hands. They are marching on Edinburgh to seize us and slaughter me."

"And me?" she asked listlessly, lying back in a long chair that served her as a day-bed.

"Have you no care for your husband?" he asked harshly. "What they will do with you, you know well enough. Lochleven and secret murder, and for me——"

"Let them do their will!" she interrupted. "I care nothing and care not who knows it. Leave me here and save yourself. All I care for is my son; you know it."

He laughed aloud.

"Well, and I can get him for you and will! You and he are my strength. Let me raise an army and he is ours. You have called me a brute but not a fool. Up and doing! To-day we ride for Borthwick Castle. My plate and papers and jewels are gone an hour since. And I have packed off

your French servants that will do us nothing but hurt with the Scots people. Honest Scots are good enough to serve you."

Still she made no remonstrance. The thing would have driven her wild with grief once, for these poor people had been about her all her life, and had followed her good fortunes in France and her evil days in Scotland. That loss was eclipsed by a direr, and caring nothing whether she went or stayed, sure only of merciless usage in either choice, she sat silent and let him work his will, hoping for her son like a thirsty woman for water.

Yet it was the worse for her. Through Scotland again went the word : " The Queen is besotted on black Bothwell. Where he goes she goes as one so madly enamoured of him that decency is nothing to her, and the madness of passion all."

And seeing this, and Bothwell fled with her to Borthwick, the Lords entered Edinburgh blazing forth their proclamation in the light of day.

" Our will is to essay the delivery of the Queen's most noble person from the captivity and restraint in which she has been now for a long time held by the murderer of her husband who has usurped the government of her realm."

True Saint Georges indeed one and all—rushing sword in hand to the rescue of the captive princess held in the claws of the Dragon ! Who after this should dare to assert that any one of Darnley's noble avengers had been concerned in his murder ? If Bothwell dared, the steadily growing army at their back should force the lie down his black throat. All England was hailing them as the avengers of innocent blood and deliverers of the Queen from her own mad passion and Bothwell. Scotland and England would back them !

And thus armed with public opinion and a useful war-cry they rode for Borthwick Castle to rescue the Queen.

It roused even Mary from her languor of despair when Mary Seton dragged her to the window to see a stormy sunset glittering on lances and pennons, and hear the captains shouting to their men as they deployed before the Castle.

She stood looking down upon them silently a moment,

then turning to Mary Seton, she said slowly : " If at Dunbar these had come, my soul would have cried aloud for joy. Now it is too late for hope. And moreover, Mary Seton, there are moments when like a death's head behind the flesh I see a deeper meaning and reason than any I suspected a while ago. What it is I do not yet know but it will come. My terror of these men is greater than my terror of Bothwell, for they aim to steal my son and make Moray his regent, and what is his life worth then against Moray's will to be king ? Counsel me, my very dear. Should I throw myself with the Lords or Bothwell ? Alone, I cannot stand. They have stolen my money—my jewels—there is nothing left."

" Madam, I see so much that I dare counsel no more—though I will follow you to death and beyond. But I believe in my soul that the Lords have entangled you with Bothwell that they may destroy you together and seize your son the Prince. Were it not for this I would say : 'Leave his cut-throat hands and go to them.' But now I dare not even bid you leave this hell."

" For me there are more hells than one. Many. For I have tested them. There is the hot hell where Bothwell reigns, and the cold hell of Moray and Lethington, and the eternal for-ever-and-ever hell of Elizabeth. Do you think it possible, Mary Seton, that if I ran until I came to Leith with my hair pulled over my face to hide me, that some boat of angels would take me over the cold sea to France and set me ashore, and I would wander, and some kind old soul would say : '*La pauvre femme ! Mon Dieu, quelle tristesse !*' And when I heard that dear tongue I would fall down on the sacred soil and wet the grass with tears—not bitter like those I shed here but soft and healing as April rain. And then I would rise and wander on through the blossomed land, and at every *auberge* they would give me black bread to eat and a cup of warm goat's milk, and good-bye to my bitter Queendom and the world should forget me—forget me for ever more."

And as she said these words dreaming awake, her long throat leaned back against the window, a dying sunbeam falling on her deep white eyelids and the dark that fringed them on her cheek, a smile on her lips, amorous, but for no man alive or dead, she was so lovely that her very looks

sealed her fate, for who could wander through meadows sweet with may, carrying such a treasure of beauty more rich than any crown jewels, and with none to guard it but her sweet anger which made it more desirable? As she dreamed awake there came a dream also to Mary Seton in which she saw her Lady winged and haloed with flame, red ruin breaking out of her in the fire that tempers men's swords and kindles cities—the flame that brought Troy down in dross and made an end of Egypt—the scorching fire of beauty unutterable that comes not often in the centuries, but when it comes blows honour and life and death before it like leaves carried on a whirlwind. Was the Lords' cruelty true instinct? Must such beauty be buried in vaulted gloom and fettered with iron lest the whole world break loose to seize it? Already the Catholic princes were stirring in Europe, and England arming, and Bothwell—he had once been a decent enough lout, as Mary Seton remembered him—but now he too had drunk of the maddening philtre, and losing his shape of man had grovelled among the swine. Almost she feared Mary Stuart, looking upon that delicate beauty, sweeter than honey, more amorous than the songs of hidden nightingales, careless of its own power and above every lover, in truth for ever out of any man's reach, escaping though possessed: the world's own loveliness.

The door burst open and startled each from her dream. Bothwell, red in the face with hurry and hate.

"Madam, I fly in ten minutes for my life. Take your orders."

Fly? Bothwell? The fighting man, the swashbuckler? The women stared at each other for a minute charged with fate. Then Mary turned on him.

"This Castle is so strong that ten men could hold it!"

"Yes, and hold me also like a rat in a trap for months when I should be out raising an army for your son and you? A fool could see that, one should say! I go with young Crookston alone, and I go with him for that he being young and lady-faced these swine may think you fled with me in disguise, and he is willing to lead them astray. But for you, Madam, dress yourself as a cavalier this night and join me at Black Castle, and together we will raise the country. Your life is on it!"

He saw her look of joy at his leaving, the fall of her face at the order to follow, and met both with brutal truth.

"I read your thought. But listen—once and for the last time I tell you the Lords have need of your son. He is the king of the game both to England and Scotland, to the Lords and to me. But the Lords have no need of you, and I have need of you, for without you I cannot hold him. With you and him I can hold the Crown for both. Therefore choose, I have no more to say. Escape alone this night if you will save your son. Make for Cakermuir and there I meet you. Fail, and you lose your son and your Crown."

He was gone.

"It is true—true!" the Queen said hurriedly. "You know it, Mary Seton. The prison of Lochleven for me, and England or death for the child. I will follow. My good fame is dead already, so what matter?"

There comes a pass in the affairs of unhappy mortals when every course is evil, and to Mary Seton it seemed they faced it now. To stay in Dunbar was ruin, to flee to Bothwell most deadly shame—witnessing for the worst ever said or thought of the Queen. It supported the story of her mad love of Bothwell, of the prompting of her husband's murder—all, all!

The gloom in her face answered the Queen's despair as she repeated: "I must go. Help me—or not me, a most worthless woman—but my son. For him I must raise Scotland and then—slip into a French convent and so end."

It was impossible for Mary Seton to answer otherwise than to say: "It is madness. At least let me ride with you. You shall not go alone and in the wood and the night."

"My life is all madness. What—risk you and cut my chance in two? Stay you safe here, for none will lay a finger on you! Be wise, girl. Lose no time! Run."

Therefore that night in the moonless dark a strange thing was done, for in the banqueting-hall stood a tall young cavalier most noble and beautiful in person and what could be seen of his face beneath his hat, and about his waist and shoulders a rope cunningly secured, and beside him Mary

Seton and two men of the guard; one, Erskine; both blazing with ardour at the Queen's daring. And with bated breath they lowered her carefully from the great window near twenty feet to the grass below, where a pony saddled and tethered munched a bundle of hay in quiet, and so going softly she struck into the woods and vanished in the dark without alarm from man or dog.

So Beauty must wander weeping through the world's ways not knowing them, lost and astray; and as Beauty wandered in the wild woods by Borthwick Castle that night, seeking, seeking and never finding, and in the morning wandering, re-crossing her own hopeless circles in dim desire of death, a party of men riding towards Dunbar met her at Cakermuir—and at their head black Bothwell. They had met according to his will.

When he seized the bridle and turned the pony's head to Dunbar there came on her such a full consciousness of the powerlessness of man in the face of fate that she went dumb and all but dead.

"So my lady and love cannot live without her man and must risk life and fame to meet me once more!" he said with his laugh echoed by his men. There again she had played into his hands, and he must always win—she lose. From that moment she awaited her fate as a thing inevitable, and saw herself the prize of villainy whichever might prove the strongest.

The rest of that black chapter is briefly told. He raised an army in her name and the Prince's. The Lords were drawn for battle in the Queen's name. Bothwell—holding the Queen with him as a hostage—marched from Dunbar against them. In the words of Melville, her old and trusted friend:

> "Though the Queen was there I cannot name it her army, for many held belief that she had intelligence with the Lords, chiefly those Lords who understood Bothwell's ill-treatment of her. So part of his own army detested him, the other part believed that Her Majesty desired to be rid of him."

The truth is that none knew the whole truth except the Lords. It was a blinding tangle, and with such convictions

the end was sure, for there was no fight in Bothwell's army. The forces met at Carberry Hill, and du Croc, the kindly French Ambassador, still pitying the sorrowful woman who had been Queen of France, offered to mediate, and leaving the Lords crossed the space between and entered the Queen's tent, himself unconsciously playing the game of the Lords.

He found her sitting with hard bright eyes, no sign of fear, but carrying herself as one who defies a cruel and unjust fate. Bowing he spoke : " Madame, it would sorely grieve Her Majesty your mother-in-law, and the King of France, to see you in such grief. I have spoken with the Lords who say they are your humble and affectionate subjects."

She looked at him proudly.

" These are the men who contradict their own signatures. They drew a bond signed by them forcing the marriage on me. They married me to him calling him guiltless of the murder of which they now accuse him. And now they desire to slay him and me, we having served their turn. Let them acknowledge their duty and I will forgive them."

And as she spoke Bothwell entered, hectoring and violent.

" What will the Lords be at ? "

Du Croc, avoiding his outstretched hand, answered briefly : " They are Her Majesty's very humble servants but your mortal foes."

The dark brows gloomed and knotted above his one eye.

" Are not the assurances they gave me in the bond known to all the world ? It is envy of my greatness, for not one of them but would be gladly in my place. And they will ruin the Queen and the Prince. Tell them that to spare Scots blood I will wager my cause on single combat with any one of them. It is so just that God will honour me with victory."

Du Croc turned to the Queen. She looked up and at him her eyes brimming with tears.

" When I consider my hard choice and how these men have used me and lied to me—marrying me to him as the best of men and now calling him murderer—I will not trust them, and I will take his quarrel as my own, if choose I must. There is no more to say."

And du Croc left her in haste, not knowing in his soul whether she had chosen the most or least ruinous part, to such a pass had fate brought her.

But she could not hold her resolution. Suddenly, death-pale, the terror of Bothwell rushed over her again like a wave. She called an officer to her and spoke low and hurried words.

"Stay! Hold! I will see the envoy of the Lords. What have they to offer? Desire Kirkaldy of Grange to come and speak with me."

Had she known him for her calumniator in England, would it have saved her? Who can tell? The Fates were drawing her to doom as always in the crises of her life. They had no pity on her.

Bothwell, for once speaking truth, interposed: "If you trust them it will be at your deadly peril. Better Dunbar, where I will hold you against them until the Kingdom rallies to you. I warn you against them for the last time—and I know them for hell-fiends."

Dunbar! The word was enough. She brushed him aside.

"I will go to them. Do not fear. I will make terms for you." And turning to Kirkaldy she reiterated: "I will go. Will they assure the life of the Duke of Orkney?"—loyal, so far as possible to a man who had most bitterly betrayed her.

Fire of hatred broke out of Kirkaldy as he turned and glared at Bothwell. He was a good hater like all the Lords.

"Never! They will have his head if they can get it."

For the last time in life she turned to Bothwell: "I command you—retire to Dunbar and there await my pleasure. I will write it."

"For my part," he said, leaning on his bared sword and looking her in the face for the last time, "I counsel you at least to take a safe-conduct before you trust them and——"

But Kirkaldy, dominating the strange scene, answered: "Everyone of us will yield Her Majesty obedience next to God in all she is pleased to command. For yourself, go!"

And Mary echoed the word.

He turned and rode off the field followed by his men.

So ended their marriage. Thirty days of shame and despair, short in time, long as eternity in grief. So he left the woman he had ruined through her fatal belief in his honour. For the Lords having won their game wasted no time in pursuing Bothwell. Better for them that he should flee Scotland, and finding no help in England be driven to the world's end, as indeed happened. He had played his part and fallen before Moray's cunning, and it was the Queen's turn now.

For Kirkaldy took her—with Mary Seton riding behind her—into the Lords' camp—and they led her as a close prisoner into Edinburgh—with a banner going before her whereon was painted Darnley's corpse beneath a tree, and the little Prince kneeling beside his father with the words: "Judge and avenge our cause, O Lord," issuing from his infant mouth. And when she saw it she swooned and would have fallen from her horse, but that they held her up and forced her to see.

And so, with cries of the men-at-arms ringing about her and deafening the air with clamour of: "Burn the witch! Burn her! Burn the murderess! Burn the wanton! The shameless light-o'-love,"—they marched her into Edinburgh to meet the yells of the women of the town, and the maddened people who had been taught to believe her very beauty a weapon of the devil's own.

Once she turned to Morton. "Take my blood if you will have it, but not this!"

And still they led her onward through hell.

Onward through the yelling populace, hoping that some bolder villain than the rest would dash her to death and take the blame, leaving them the reward. And in Edinburgh they thrust her into the Black Turnpike, the felons' prison, and took her women from her, and left her there alone with the people outside yelling to get at her like leaping wolves.

Six years she had reigned in Scotland, first a girl of eighteen sweet and hopeful as May flowers, wise to rule if she had had the chance: too gentle, too trustful, for the barbarians among whom she came—born before her time in

wisdom and love for her subjects—could they have known it. Now a woman of four and twenty maddened with such anguish as the world has not known before or after.

All night she sat alone in the prison starving and stunned, without a change of garments. Next day they led her on foot to Holyrood, still hoping against hope that the rabble would tear her in pieces before their eyes, and so it might have been, but that behind her as a guard went two of her Maries, Mary Seton and Mary Livingstone (now Sempill) bearing the yells and insults of the mob with their Queen—knowing that any moment the yells of : " Burn her —drown her," might be enacted before their eyes in blood, and their own doom follow. And behind them came Jane Kennedy and the French ladies Courcelles and Rallay.

Once with royal spirit she turned on the rabble. " I am innocent. I am your true Princess and Sovereign. You are deceived by false traitors." And more she would have said but they drowned her voice with paid yells and jeers. And so she went to her palace.

At Holyrood was brief respite, for the Lords knew the mob was no measure of the Scots people who loved their Queen well. They wrapped her in a coarse riding-cloak that covered her from head to foot. Lindsay and Ruthven with their men-at-arms dragged her to ride, and so to the water-side and across it in a waiting vessel. Again they forced her to horseback, and so going swiftly for hours they brought her to the hills where the Loch of Leven lies like a blue jewel.

There she beheld the lonely island, the lonely castle, where it seemed the last tragedy of her tragic life was to be enacted ; where her father whose sin had borne such bitter fruit for her was still to perpetuate it in the jailership of his paramour—mother of Moray and his brother—a woman most bitter and jealous, now the wife of a Douglas, and with sons by her marriage to aid the cruelties of her paramour's son.

Then indeed Mary drew back for the first time shuddering: " I will not. I will not."

But in vain. Lindsay and Ruthven knew well that the loyal Setons were hard on their track. No time to lose !

They dragged her struggling to the boat and across the lake to the dreary castle gateway.

It was done. The Lords had played their game and won.

And far off in England Elizabeth hearing it thanked God for a happy issue out of all her afflictions.

PART IV

After awhile Mary Seton and one or two more of her faithful ladies were allowed to rejoin her. Since it was impossible she should ever escape and there were excellent reasons for supposing that her life in the Lords' hands might not be long, it was judged politic to grant that small indulgence—especially as in such a prison not even Mary Seton could hope to send or receive any intelligence of the outer world. They knew her very little and were too ready to accept the humble and chastened demeanour she thought proper to adopt as a sign of change of heart. But perhaps Moray would have regretted his mercy could he have hidden behind the curtains of the bed hung with green velvet, "made in the likeness of a chapel," where Mary lay when Mary Seton rushed to her arms. For, after the first passionate joy the Seton searched every inch of the bedroom, and only the stiff figures of knights and ladies hawking and hunting in tapestry on the walls were in a position to hear what she said. She knelt by the bed holding the white hands in her own vibrant clasp.

"Take heart, Mary Stuart, take heart as never yet! Talk not of prison. The day is at hand that we shall rejoice that things are as they are, for good is hidden in it. Listen to the news I bring and strengthen your own quick wit and high heart. You shall yet sit in Stirling by the Prince and scorn the villains. But listen!"

She produced a small paper from her bosom and unfolded it, adding: "You shall know better how to meet Moray when he comes with his snake's face to play the honest brother. This is yet another bond—the third—which the Lords signed at the Privy Council the day they also signed the warrant for Your Grace's imprisonment.

"We declare that Bothwell without fear of God or reverence for the person of his Sovereign beset Her Majesty's way, seized her most noble person and led her away with him to Dunbar Castle there detaining her prisoner. No nobleman nor other durst resort to Her Majesty, her chamber doors being constantly watched with armed men. We began to consider specially the preservation of the life of the fatherless Prince, the righteous heir-apparent of our Sovereign, and Her Highness's shameful bondage with the said

Earl, and foresaw the great danger which the Prince stood in because the murderer of his father, the ravisher of the Queen, his mother, was armed with the principal strength of the realm. At last in the fear and name of God and in the lawful obedience of our Sovereign, we have taken arms to revenge the said horrible and cruel murder upon the Earl of Bothwell and to deliver our Sovereign from his hands."

"How after that shall they charge you with murder and adultery?" she ended triumphing and waving the paper above her head.

Mary snatched it and read it through.

"It is great news!" she said drawing a long breath. "It is true. They cannot say I am guilty either of the murder or Bothwell's love after this. And to sign it on the very day they dragged me to Lochleven—the liars! But how did you come by it?"

"Lethington's wife. She looks through his papers for us," answered Mary Seton tersely. "But, my heart, I have better news still—through the same! God's blessing on Mary Fleming—for 'Lethington' I will not call the darling! The King of France is on your side, though the cold Queen-Mother—I never liked her!—sits still considering which way to jump, and dreams of her son Anjou marrying the English witch. And yet again—now smile for the first time for months! There is a glorious party of the Scots nobles for Your Grace gathering in arms. Herries is with them and the Setons and many another, and I would say this——"

But Mary interrupted her by flinging her arms about her neck and stifling her true lips with kisses. At twenty-four hope is seldom beyond the resurrection of glad news, and for a moment the sunshine turning the slopes of Benarty to purple bloom beyond her high window appeared to her the loveliest sight she had seen in her life. She was not forgotten, faithful hearts were beating for her, planning for her, unresting night and day.

"But hear me!" said Mary Seton, when the tender stranglehold released her. "I am older than you, Mary Stuart. I shall reach the wise age of twenty-five two months before you; therefore, I bear the wisdom of age! You are worn out by the heaped horrors of this dreadful year. From

the murder of the King in February, to Lochleven—O that iron man-woman downstairs—was there ever such a light-o'-love in the world!—you have gone from one torture to another. Now let me tell you what it did to you!"

"My glass tells me," Mary said sadly. "No need to press that truth, Mary Seton."

"Every need, Mary Stuart, and for a reason. It hollowed your cheeks and made them like colourless ivory. It left your eyes so large and dark that they overflow your white face with darkness. It made your nostrils transparent and your lips the colour of the Queen-Mother's Florentine rosary of white coral. If I unbound your hair should I find a grey hair anywhere in its burnishing? O—I must dress it for you! But what I say is this—since I saw you in Edinburgh your cheeks are less hollow, a little colour has flowed into your lips. Your eyes do not shadow outward with glooms beneath them. This is because you have rested in your great chapel of a bed knowing you are rid of the ruffian Bothwell. Therefore take this imprisonment as a resting time during which you can recapture youth, health, and strength, until the Setons summon you out to join them in open field and reconquer the crown. Do I say well?"

"Dear, you hearten me—you hearten me!" she said with her own impulsive soul, quick to shine and sadden. "But, Mary Seton—the shame is on me that I foretold. What shall I do with Bothwell's child in the prison of Lochleven—and that bad woman to mock me and rejoice? Shall I love or loathe it? I love my son. But this!"

She lay back on the silken pillows, the dark amber hair raying wide over them, her face like a little white wedge in the midst, with eyes of intricate pain.

"I forget sometimes whose it is!" she said innocently, "and then am glad, and again it comes on me like a black rushing wave drowning heaven and earth in shame from my sight. Very terrible is the life of a woman! God knows I have proved it. Can we wonder my father died because I was born? Better I too were dead!"

"And that too will come in God's good time when all this dark is white!" said the other Mary, bathing her loving hands in the great waves of hair and piling them above the pale face. Whatever the horror of Bothwell's mark in her heart, she kept it to herself. Presently: "If I,

a maid, may speak—I think that a child is a jewel even if found in the mud, and its perfection perfect, if the devil were its father, as they say he fathers a witch's children. Marriage may not be made in heaven, Madam—we have not much cause to hold that faith—but for children—they come straight from God's hand, and this one shall lie in your breast and you will forget the prison. But——"

There was a loud noise in the castle below—a hurry of arrival, great voices of men, shouts and answers. Mary Seton flew to the window and flung words back over her shoulder.

"Boats. Men waiting. Some great persons have come. What is it, what is it, Willie Douglas?" For in the outer room she had caught sight of a slim page-boy, pretty as a girl in his golden curls and red slashed doublet, waiting to attract her attention.

He advanced toward the Queen's door and stood reverently outside, addressing Mary Seton with a low bow.

"It is George Douglas, madam, that has sent me to warn Her Majesty that some of the Lords have ridden to Lochleven and must see her."

Mary Seton pressed her hand to her bosom. That name of bitter ill omen—the Lords!

"Who are they, Willie Douglas. What says George?"

The son of Lady Douglas's marriage after the King had done with her, Mary Seton had known him in Edinburgh and at her father's house, a tall, chivalrous young man excellently well-knit, and with broad white brow and kindly eyes. Certainly a son of the jailer woman of Lochleven, yet for all that to be trusted, for honour was written on his face in the letters that cannot lie.

"Could he come and speak with me?"

"Most certainly, madam, I run when you tell me!"

He sped through the presence chamber, nearly knocking Jane Kennedy's embroidery from her hand, and off with him like a scarlet butterfly with gold splashes on its wings. Mary Seton went softly back into the Queen's chamber.

"Madam, it is the Lords. George Douglas will give me word. Meanwhile, shall Jane Kennedy dress you?"

She made a quick "Yes" with her hand. Already the strained look in her eyes, the nervous twitch near the corners of her mouth heralded the enemy. Jane Kennedy

ran in, her arms heaped with black velvet, for rid of Bothwell, the Queen had resumed her widow's dress and wore it always. Mary Seton went to the door and waited with what patience she could.

Presently the head of a young man came up the winding stair, broad shoulders following, and fronted her with a bow and a reserved look, as though his mother's son must observe the prescribed attitude to his mother's prisoner and her attendants.

"I desire, madam, to inform you that Lord Lindsay of the Byres my brother-in-law, and Sir Robert Melville—not Sir James Melville—have come to see Her Majesty as Commissioners on important business, and desire an audience."

Lindsay, Mary's most brutal enemy. Robert Melville, a traitor almost as smooth and dangerous as Lethington! That conjunction could portend no good. She answered calmly however: "By the time the Commissioners are refreshed the Queen will receive them. Do you return with them?"

"Dare I ask why, madam?"

"Certainly. It is because Lindsay is capable of such brutality to all weaker than himself that she may need a gentleman's protection."

A good stroke. He answered, kindling with pleasure: "She shall have it, madam. Lord Lindsay is known. I will be there."

When Mary had been ceremoniously dressed by Jane Kennedy in black velvet, a triple chain of pearls about her neck, a rosary by her side of gold beads, ruff frail as a spider's morning cobweb and floating veil like its mists, she was a queenly figure indeed, from the lawn coif on her head to the little embroidered satin shoe which had scanty leave to show beneath the sweeping velvet. She sat in a high carved chair with a crown surmounting the entablature of arms at the back, for she herself had furnished the royal rooms at Lochleven in happier days. Her feet rested on a stool where the Lion of Scotland ramped in pride. Her delicate hands lay on the broad arms of the chair, whence her black drapery wept itself away like wintry waters. Thus she awaited their coming, Sir Robert Melville's fawning grace and Lindsay's unwilling forced salutation. Between him and the Queen rose always the image of

Riccio shrieking for the mercy refused him as he clung to her robe for sanctuary.

George Douglas waited behind them at the door.

"You have come, gentlemen, to the Sovereign you have imprisoned. Is it to ask for pardon?"

Lindsay pulled a chair and flung himself impudently into it, his sword clanking at his side. Melville stood fronting her. Lindsay spoke.

"Far otherwise, Madam. We have brought papers which you are to sign, with your good-will as we hope, against it if otherwise, setting forth your abdication of the crown of this realm, your desire for the coronation of your son the Prince under the regency of your trusty brother the Earl of Moray, and your desire to lead henceforth a quiet life free from the cares of State."

If Mary changed colour a little it was her only sign of emotion. She had passed so swiftly in the last six months from horror to horror that it had given her fortitude, on which she stayed herself in a kind of incredulous certainty that though these things happened to all outward appearance yet they could not be in truth. They happened, yet would prove otherwise.

She said firmly: "The request is madness. On what do you base it?"

Sitting crouched in his chair and fixing her with hard yellow eyes like a beast of prey about to spring, Lindsay answered leaving Melville's work to follow.

"Easily answered. On the grounds of tyranny, because you have broken and violated the laws and statutes made by the Lords for the realm's protection. Incontinency, for you have committed adultery with Bothwell and others, as proved in letters written to him and in our possession. Murder of the late King, of which we hold complete proof in the said letters and elsewhere, as well as by your wedding Bothwell the arch-murderer of your husband. Of these letters hidden in your silver casket, we came possessed on the twentieth of June, they being found on the person of Dalgleish, Bothwell's servant, and their discovery invalidates all proclamations issued by us earlier."

A moment's amazement, and the Queen laughed aloud.

"Forgers as well as liars! I would like well to see your work. Choose a more likely tale! You are jesting, man!

Your folly does not go so far. There are no letters of mine but those the whole world may read."

The man might have spat at her from his hunched hatred. Mary Seton's little fingers gripped on the back of the Queen's chair.

She shot a warning glance at George Douglas as the Queen went on: "And you found these letters on the twentieth day of June in this precious silver casket?"

"Certainly. And foul reading they are for a Queen's writing."

Mary parried swiftly.

"And yet on the twenty-sixth of June, six days later, the Lords, having read this foul stuff, issue a proclamation against Bothwell for his treason in carrying me to Dunbar and compelling me to marry him. And you assert you took up arms to deliver your sorely oppressed Sovereign from his cruel hands! My Lord, it would appear you need Moray to instruct you in your lies and forgeries. You are not so skilful when he is away over the Border."

Lindsay flushed violently. He laid a hand on his sword, and George Douglas who had hung on her words made a step forward, then controlled himself. And indeed she had spoken with a spirit that broke out of her like fire, and became her most excellently well.

"Let us have none of this trifling!" Lindsay said with a growl. "No time to waste in woman's babble. The Scots people are wearied with your wantonness and tyranny. There is no chance for your life if you protest your rights further, and you must be put away as a public danger. Here are three deeds. In the first you willingly resign the crown to your son. In the second you appoint your brother James Stuart, Earl of Moray, as regent during the Prince's minority. In the third you appoint a council headed by Morton to carry on the government till Moray's return. Sign, therefore, for your life hangs on it."

He pushed the pen into the hand which refused to receive it, and as she half rose in her chair, Melville stepped forward to take up his part in the play.

"My Lord, I dare to say you are too harsh in your zeal, and have not reasoned with our gracious Lady. Why should she accept without due cause shown? I take leave to ask a private audience during which you will wait in the

ante-chamber. Our Mistress was always clear of brain and will ; able as any man to consider the rights and wrongs of a question. Let me lay it before her."

Lindsay rose as if unwilling and left the room without bow or leave asked. Mary Seton, after a glance interchanged with the Queen, glided into the bed-chamber and listened with her ear against the door. George Douglas followed Lindsay.

Melville placed himself before Mary and began with insidious quiet.

" Madam, as your true well-wisher and humble servant I entreat you to sign these deeds without hesitation, and to that end I desire to present you with a token from certain of the Lords who love you and know your danger ! "

He produced a beautiful turquoise ring, and laid it on the table before her.

" Your Grace, this comes from the Earls of Argyll, Huntley and Athol, from Secretary Lethington and Kirkaldy of Grange, who out of their humble duty beseech you to sign for otherwise there is a plot to take your life which is in fearful danger from the Lords of the Secret Council. Sign, good Madam—it is only upon compulsion and therefore in no way valid. All shall go well."

She looked at him calmly, a dangerous gleam of insight in her eyes.

" Well planned—and very well planned, but not so as to catch me. If this requisition came from the Scots people and they had ceased to love me, I would hear and sign. But they love me and this is only the ambition of the Lords and my brother. I will not sign."

With an air of the utmost secrecy and finger to his lip as though a listener were present, Melville drew his sword from the scabbard and turning the latter upside down a small folded paper fell out which he presented.

" I have carried it at my life's hazard, Madam. Read and consider. It is a letter from Throckmorton carrying you the urgent advice of the Queen of England to sign because you should not anger those who hold you in their power by refusing the only concession that can save your life. She adds—as I have told you—that no deed extorted by force is valid. Therefore sign."

She ran her eye carelessly over the paper presented with

such pomp and secrecy and then sharply tore it in four pieces and flung it on the floor.

"I will not sign. Recall Lindsay. I refuse utterly."

He argued smoothly, steadily for half an hour and more, and to each covert threat, each wily argument, she answered always and steadily: "I will not sign," until Mary Seton listening at the door marvelled at her courage and calm. Presently the thundering knock of the handle of a sword rattling upon the door of the presence chamber and Lindsay flung it open, standing menacing and dark in the open in full armour even to his iron gauntlets, only the head bare.

"You are as long as if you were love-making, Melville. How dares the woman refuse the commands of the Lords? You have bidden her sign and she will not. I do not ask. I command. Sign, Madam, or it will be the worse for you. We will smother you in your bed and hang you to the bed-post, and tell the world that in terror of your crimes and punishment you hanged yourself like Judas. Sign without delay or worse will befall you."

She said steadily: "You are able for that or anything. Who should know better than I? Yet sign I will not. I am four and twenty, my child not a year old. This is to make Moray king and I will none of it. I will not sign."

Melville crept up behind her, whispering smoothly like the Evil One in her ear and George Douglas, stiff against the door to watch, restrained himself as a leashed hound who glimpses the deer.

"Madam, he is capable of that. Sign and save your life. It is not valid."

And still she answered: "I will not sign."

"But sign you shall and here and now," roared Lindsay haggard with desperation, the devil unchained in his soul. "There is a tower in this castle—a dungeon like a stone chest—no more—and there we will lay you to rot and die walled up from air and light and the sight of human kind. We will bury you there alive this day. Choose. Sign."

Melville had drawn back to give place to the more violent villain. She looked up—alone with the two but for George Douglas, son of her jailer, rigid against the door.

"I will not sign."

Rage overcame him. He snatched her arm in his steel

gauntlet driving the metal into it, torturing the tender flesh until blood burst at the points of the iron fingers.

"You shall sign if I wring the arm off you."

Even Melville paled at her deadly pallor. Would he murder the Queen before his eyes? If so, perhaps best—and an end of much trouble. Suddenly, livid with pain, she fell back in her chair, half fainting.

"I will sign. I have my arm to show for the means used by the Lords. George Douglas, bear witness. Give me the papers."

They laid the papers before her. Melville, as guilty as the other, holding them on the table and without a word more, with eyes half closed and tears of agony rolling from them, she signed the deeds that unqueened her.

They got themselves out of the room and the castle as quickly as might be, and when the plash of the oars had died away on the loch George Douglas, pale as grey ash, came up the stair and walked into the room so transported beyond himself that he did not know that unasked and unannounced he had broken into a Queen's presence. She lay back in her chair with closed eyelids, Mary Seton pale as the Queen herself bathing the bloody bruises of the iron fingers and thumb. He spoke loudly from the door.

"Madam, I would have throttled the ruffian, whom God curse along with my sister that wedded him, but that I valued my life for what I say now. May God do so to me and more also if I do not set you free from my foul mother and foul kin, and ride behind you as the lowest of your servants on the day you are free, and in token of this vow I kiss the cross-handle of my sword as in the presence of the Creator. Count on me in life and death!"

She opened her eyes faintly, staring at him from a dream of pain and terror.

"Sir, it is worth it. I thank you."

He beckoned Mary Seton for a moment.

"Madam, my elder brother the castellan, Sir William Douglas refused to be with them, and as they left he called in a loud voice before all present: 'Say to the Lords that I protest against the foul wrong done under my roof. You are not men but devils.' And so they left, in dead silence. The great Devil speed and reward them!"

He turned and went, a high purpose in his soul.

There was some feeling even in England when it was known. There are men who though they will not relinquish the hunt yet have a spasm of shame when they see the fox dug out and flung to the hounds to be torn to bloody rags. It may be supposed perhaps that Throckmorton had something of the same untender regard for the quarry he had chased so long. Be that as it may, he burst forth with words to Kirkaldy and the arch-sinner Lethington which surprised himself as he read them over. It is certain that even Elizabeth also had moments of contempt for the tools who served her turn in Scotland. At least, she never loved them. Perhaps both could afford to be truth-speakers for an instant now their turn was so well served. It must have been a luxury.

> "Yourselves wrote against your Queen, fought against her and were the chief cause of her apprehension, imprisonment and the loss of her crown, with something more which I might say if it were not to grieve you too much. But plainness argues friendship, and so I trust you take it. You two were the chief occasion of all the calamities as she asserts that she has fallen into. You, Lord of Lethington, by your persuasion and advice to imprison her; yes—to have taken presently the life from her. And you, Lord of Grange, by your solicitation, toil, and labour to bring in others to put in execution what you, Lord of Lethington, had planned."

But this coming from Throckmorton was indeed a tone to rouse alarm in the astute Lethington's mind, especially as he had just written to Secretary Cecil a whining letter begging Elizabeth's money.

> "I pray we may (for the relief of the noblemen) find some comfort of money at the Queen Majesty's hands, which being accorded the game is done."

Done. Mary, thirsting more passionately than ever to face her foes in open field, was held prisoner not only by the strong walls of Lochleven and the desolate loch about it, but by a woman's weakness. The child of Bothwell about

to be born after months of misery chained her into temporary physical and spiritual weakness. She felt herself unclean from head to foot with a contamination that even the cleansing agonies of childbirth could never remove. What deliverance could there be for her from so grievous a stain and what could be the child's fate ?

Catherine, her French mother-in-law, half swaying to Elizabeth's side as women do to the fortunate, still wrote her sympathy. She replied passionately from her hell of body and mind :

> "Madame, I write to you at the same time I write to the King your son. I beseech you both to have pity on me. I am now fully convinced it is only by force I can be delivered. If you send never so few troops I am certain great numbers of my subjects will rise to join them, but otherwise, they are overawed by the power of the rebels. The miseries I endure are more than I once believed it was in the power of human sufferance to sustain and live. Give credit to this messenger who can tell you all."

She could at least communicate with the world and hear all its tidings now that George Douglas had devoted himself to her service. Once the letters were written they went to and fro with regularity when he was fishing or hunting on the mainland, thinking with joy that he was the warp on which all her hopes were spun. The cruel prints of Lindsay's claws on her arm were faded but for five small scars and the flesh sweet and white as privet blossom again. In his heart they could never fade ; still the red flow of blood tinged his thought of them, and one thing only would assuage that flow—to be the means of her deliverance. Indeed he had progressed far in his plan. Loyal Setons and Douglases were hidden in the hamlets about. Loyal hearts received her messages and laughed for joy. The end was not far distant now.

But she, in the foolish trust of her too-confident soul, brooding on Elizabeth and the part she played in her ruin, still believed that for the sake of her own safety she could not see another Sovereign thus deposed and maltreated. It was her dream repeated again and again to Mary Seton that

Elizabeth must recognize the truth that only in full confidence between them, and in large measures of toleration for the Catholic and the Reformed Faiths, lay any hope of safety for either, and that hand in hand they could represent both and shape a new world of wisdom and toleration for both.

One day a letter of doubtful friendship reached her from Elizabeth, and as usual the least word of kindness was sufficient to rekindle hope and confidence.

"If I could be freed and Queen again in Scotland the first person whom I would meet would be my good sister!" she said earnestly to Mary Seton. "And I will write and so tell her."

"With a large army, I trust!" the other Mary answered sarcastically. "Write what you will, Madam, but never trust that sallow witch with your person. And now, have you considered the proposal of the Lords that you should disown Bothwell?"

Mary raised her head with spirit.

"After the child is born—how sooner? What—make it illegitimate when the Prince's life may fail? That child would be heir or heiress of Scotland—and I to bear a bastard! Write that answer for me and I will sign it. I wonder where the wretch wanders to-day—now he has left Scotland."

"Of that, Madam, George Douglas has brought word if you will hear."

George Douglas entered, eager and swift in his tidings. The very name of Bothwell was poisonous in his ears as in those of all true Scotsmen, and joy in reciting his downfall made his eyes bright and blue as summer seas in the recital.

"The Lords have outlawed him, Madam, and his ship is wrecked in Denmark where the King has made him prisoner in Malmoe Castle, hence never to be freed while life is in his body. Rejoice therefore and thank God."

She joined her hands looking upward with such strange and bitter memories of trust misplaced and ruin following as no words could utter. George Douglas went quietly away. Mary Seton uttered no word. She passed into the room where Jane Kennedy sat stitching her embroidery, and the Queen sitting by the window looked out upon the wintry landscape white with snow—the lake like black marble in

its setting—and thought it a picture of life's unending winter.

That night her child was born—a girl—and before she had wakened from the swoon of pain and oblivion it was committed by the Lords' orders to Lady Douglas and shipped with a nurse—a thing pitiful and wailing—to France to be brought up in the great convent at Soissons.

Of her parents she knew nothing. Of her less is known. They say she lived and died a nun at Soissons, and those who saw her with knowledge could trace in no line of lip or brow the fatal beauty which had made her mother's life a sorrow—not only to herself but to three kingdoms. Such was the child of the wild loves, wild hates, of one of the strangest, most terrible stories that burn upon the pages of history.

As for the Queen they told her the child was born dead and she was glad. Best for both, and every day Bothwell grew more dreamlike to her—a nightmare lost at dawn. For hope was astir in the prison of Lochleven.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FEW weeks later, still pale and transparent in cheek and hand from her fruitless child-bearing, Mary sat in the circular presence-chamber with Mary Seton and Jane Kennedy talking listlessly as they stitched their mimic flowers on a satin tapestry. A letter was spread out on the table before her, one of Elizabeth's crabbed, intricate, intensely characteristic letters—not indeed addressed to her but to the Queen-Mother of France who had sent it onward. Letters went and came regularly through George Douglas who had quarrelled with his mother and betaken himself to the mainland for greater freedom in plotting. Mary never saw him, but letters were safely hidden in the gay doublet of little Willie Douglas—the foundling whose parentage no one ostensibly knew, though some might guess him the son of Sir William—and certainly none could suspect that gay childish face of plots though he was getting on to his sixteenth year. Fishing, rowing, shooting with his bow and arrow and a treasure of an old gun found in the castle armoury seemed to be all his care, and if anyone had announced that these hid a passionate romantic devotion to the sad young Queen men and women would have laughed aloud. So the letters of great Kings and Queens travelled safely, shoved into Willie's long hose. He and George were close as hand and glove, and while her enemies believed the Queen sequestered like a dead woman in her grave, she was in touch with all Europe.

But this letter moved her strangely because certain words in it were not only a cordial to her hope but appealed to her reason. Elizabeth wrote thus to the Queen-Mother of France whom she had every wish to conciliate, because she was considering a marriage between herself and Catherine's son who was also Mary's brother-in-law, the Duke of Anjou. If that marriage were to take place France's interest might

be made to coincide with that of England. England's with Scotland's—and what a future might not be opened up? Eagerly Mary read:

"The Queen of England to the Queen-Mother of France.

Having learnt by your letter, Madame, your honourable intention and that of the King my brother, on the part of my desolate cousin the Queen of Scots, I rejoice very much to see that one Prince takes to heart the wrongs done to another, for I hate that change where the head is removed to the foot and the heels hold the highest place. I promise you, Madame, that even if kinship did not constrain me to wish her all honour her example would seem too terrible for neighbours to behold and princes to hear. These evils often resemble the noxious influence of some baleful planet which beginning in one place might well fall in another, not that (God be thanked) I have any doubt on my part.

Monsieur Pasquier (as I believe) thinks I have no French, by the passions of laughter into which he throws me by the formal precision with which he speaks and expresses himself. Beseeching you, Madame, if I can at this time do you any pleasure that you will let me know that I may acquit myself as a good friend in your part,

In haste at Hampton Court, this 16th October 1567.

Your good sister and cousin Elizabeth R."

She called Mary Seton to rejoice, pointing with eager finger to the hopeful phrases.

"One must laugh at her ridiculous vanity about her French, which is poor enough, God knows! Her vanity has always hackles up and teeth showing, but this letter is excellent. You see, as I have always insisted, she realizes that the infection of rebellion may spread—and she is none too safe in England. Mary Seton, I would never trust her love but it is her interest to support me."

Mary Seton shook her head sadly.

"Madam, while the Duke of Anjou is courting her it is her interest to please the Queen-Mother, but will that ever come to anything? I judge not. It is the nature of this Queen to fool all who trust her and she will go lonely and

unwept to her grave. My heart's heart, do not be fooled. She has made your miseries, and at this moment she treats you like a criminal though she knows you innocent. Do not trust her. On the knees of my heart I implore you."

Mary hesitated.

"You are too suspicious. If we trust no one, how can we thrive? And how can it advantage a Queen to see a Queen of her own blood dethroned and insulted? If I win freedom I need her help. See—I wrote this letter last night and I will send it."

Inveterately hopeful, she read it aloud with some little pride in it as likely to convince reason and melt a cold heart.

"Madam, my good sister,—the length of my weary imprisonment, and the wrongs I receive from those I have benefited are less troublous to me than not being able to acquaint you with the reality of my calamities. It may please you to remember that you have told me several times that on receiving this ring you gave me you would assist me in any time of trouble. You know that Moray has seized all I have, and those who had the keeping of some of these things have been ordered not to deliver them to me. Robert Melville, at any rate, to whom I have secretly sent for this ring as my most precious jewel says he dare not let me have it. Therefore I implore you on receiving this letter to have compassion on your good sister and cousin and believe that you have not a more affectionate relative in the world. I entreat you to be careful that no one knows I have written to you for it would cause me to be treated worse than I am now, and they boast of being informed by their friends of all you say and do.

Believe the bearer as you would myself. God keep you from misfortunes and grant me patience and His grace that I may one day recount my calamities to yourself when I will tell you more than I dare write, which may prove of no small service to yourself.

Mary R."

She looked expectantly at Mary Seton who shook her head again.

"No use, Madam. She is false to the core. I would not have you send it. I would——"

Mary flashed out into anger for once.

"Are you always to be dictating? I take things from you, Mary Seton, that I would take from no other, but when a Queen writes to a Queen——"

The other girl had been sitting at her feet to hear. She rose instantly, stiff as a ramrod and stood on duty for commands. That was Mary Seton—there was no mood she could not top, and for that the Queen loved and others hated her.

"Take this, fold and seal it and give it to Willie Douglas for George Douglas at the hamlet of Kinross. All good go with it!"

Mary Seton was gone, and the royal Mary remained alone by the window looking with wearying eyes over the sullen waters of the loch. She had lost all hope of escape unless Elizabeth could be moved—not by pity but by their common interest, and if that could not be, then life-long or life-short imprisonment was her portion. She envied the swallows darting hither and thither in fresh May air, the herons winging to their nests by Benarty, and, as she mused upon them, suddenly in their winged freedom the spiritual meaning of the world and all its griefs which sometimes seized her in dreams came as an illumination, a shower of sunshine on snow melting her chilled heart into devotion. She prayed passionately and silently.

"Alas, my soul, if God permits this for thy sins shouldst thou not kiss the rod that chastens thee? Dost thou shrink from walking through the furnace where the great Refiner will purge away thy dross to make thee shine as pure gold? Take now the wings of meditation and divine love and fly beyond Lochleven, soar far above the surrounding seas and learn there is no prison for a soul freed by God."

It was the most extraordinary moment of her life, for in the mystic trance she suddenly beheld herself beyond all power of man to touch, released, because she knew herself a part of the Unchanging and Divine, hand in hand with its omnipotence. She rose to her feet, and it seemed that the heart within her swelled until its courage and confidence gave her faith to cross the dark surrounding waters walking them like their Master. She pressed her hands to her bosom

unconscious whether her feet trod earth or she drifted above it with the birds—the birds! But again earth caught her. Mary Seton was rushing back, her face transfigured, speaking in a violent whisper, catching her by the arm.

"Madam—Madam—your last day of imprisonment. Willie Douglas has whispered in my ear. . . . O, Madam! say no more, but hold yourself ready! It is for to-morrow. To-morrow!"

For a moment Mary stood stunned—incredulous. Then her face flamed into joy.

"I knew it. It was revealed to me. And how?"

Mary Seton fell on her knees and clung about her.

"The boy will steal the keys. The boat will be ready at the postern—and the Setons—O Madam, the Setons with a troop are hidden in the Western Lomonds. No sleep to-night. None."

The Queen stooped and kissed her.

"Get ready, my Mary, you and Jane together."

"No, Madam, I stay to pretend you are here, ill in your bed, and to issue orders. They will not harm me."

"They shall not, for you shall come or I stay!"

"Mary Stuart, you talk folly. Go. Can you believe Moray or Lindsay will harm a Seton when their dearest aim is to win the Setons, and pull that thorn out of their foot? I stay—and in a few days follow. No more to it than that."

She would hear nothing else.

The suspense, the passion of waiting! Could it be true? Only the strength of her vision assured her that it was a thing certain and steadily advancing upon her.

Next day drifted slowly on with no ripple on the dull monotonous surface. The Queen's supper was served as usual in the vaulted chamber where she and her ladies ate, so ill-lit that black mysterious shadows lay like night on the ceiling and in pools on the floor. They ate in silence and hurriedly, a passover supper as those preparing for a journey.

Downstairs supper was spread in the great hall for all in the castle including the guards, who had locked all the gates for the night—Sir William Douglas and his mother sitting apart on the dais where little Willie Douglas waited upon them after the manner of pages in noble families. He held a napkin fringed with silk thrown over his arm in the ap-

proved fashion, and who seeing this smiling young face could believe that the ceremonial napkin hid a bunch of five keys, resembling those which locked the doors and held the Queen prisoner? Passing between the castellan and his mother he dropped the napkin for a second over the real keys which had been deposited at Sir William Douglas's elbow by the officer of the guard according to nightly use. They jingled and Lady Douglas looked up sharply as Willie reclaimed the napkin with a bow, disclosing the false keys which lay beneath. His heart beat a gallop at the moment. Suppose the old hag should detect some difference! Not she! She ate and talked, and Willie, half in impish boy's delight, half quavering with responsibility to shake a warrior, crammed a prepared handkerchief to his nose.

"Madam, my nose bleeds. Have I your gracious leave——?"

She made a sharp gesture with her hand and he fled leaving the false keys behind him—venerable rusty liars—and so upstairs to the Queen, waiting half-way down the stair veiled in white.

"Now—now!"

He caught her hand. A storm of talk and rough laughter burst from the hall as they slipped past. All drank and jested, careless of the prisoners in the safely locked castle, the locked gate unguarded! Willie unlocked it swiftly with keys drenched in oil, and before them lay the boat lapping the landing stones in dusking twilight—the boat and freedom!

"Jane Kennedy!" Mary started back.

"Madam. It is death to wait. Off and onwards."

No time to argue. She sprang in light as a cat and seating herself took one oar, while the boy locked the door behind them and took the other. With a strong stroke together they pulled out, and lo, a gap of black water between her and fetters!

He chuckled with glee behind her.

"O Madam, the jest! For God's sake, listen! They have locked every door for the night—barred, bolted, locked—have made themselves *our* prisoners! They will not know till morning! Laugh, Madam!"

But Mary was staring upward to the window where Mary Seton's dress showed as a dim whiteness. Love and

prayers fled upwards as she looked, and even joy trembled in the balance with shame to think she had left her.

Hark! The window beneath opened—yet high up too—and a woman dark in twilight, stood in the opening for a minute, then with pointed arms launched out like a bird into air, her dress fluttering about her, and flashed down into the black waters cleaving to receive her.

"Jane—Jane Kennedy!" cried the Queen. "O Willie, my Jane! Rest on our oars. There—she rises—she strikes out. She is a glorious swimmer. We shall get her yet!"

And sure enough the flaxen head rose from the lake and the fine steady strokes made for the boat and she was hauled aboard—laughing and dripping till the boat was a pool—and the Queen hugged her for joy and settled to the oar again.

"And Mary Seton at the door of our rooms is asking wine for the Queen sick in bed!" cried Jane, smothering her laughter. "O what a ploy—what a ploy! The world will ring with it! God bless you, my bird, for your brave heart!"

Land nearing, Mary surrendered the oar and rose to her full height—not to be mistaken for any other woman as she snatched off her white veil and waved it like a flag on the wind.

George Douglas watching, in turn leaped to his feet giving the signal to another, and in the hills the hidden Setons caught it and galloped like mad to the shore, while Willie Douglas taking the castle keys from the boat flung them into deep water where they sank, not to be reclaimed for two centuries and more. The work was done.

They saw lights flitting round the castle when they landed. Faint shouts were heard across the water. The prisoners knew—they knew—but too late. Not only were the doors locked, but Willie had spent a fruitful afternoon in stopping up the rowlocks of the other boats and holing them. Useless! The Douglases were outwitted by the Douglases.

Among the shouting Setons mad with joy, yelling with excitement, the Queen mounted and rode for her life, the two Douglases always beside her. It was a dream shot through with passing lights and shoutings and cheers until they reached the firth, and there in a fishing-boat she

embarked, heading straight for the port of South Queensferry where the Hamiltons waited with a gathering of their own men-at-arms and troops of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who galloped in burning with zeal to offer their swords and homage to the Queen. My Lord Seton led the gallop to his castle of West Niddry, and so the sickly dream of captivity dissolved in the full dawn of freedom.

Shouts, bugle-calls, drums and the wild skirl of the pipes next morning as the sun rose and she with it to the homage of the gallantest gentlemen of Scotland. They shouted for the Queen—the Queen! They would not be gainsaid—see her they must and would and without delay! Hundreds, thousands, had collected. How could they wait? Or she? White-robed, with shining hair falling in a silken veil to her knees, her face radiant with the freedom she had never known since Bothwell took her prisoner to Dunbar, she sprang on the great window-seat and flung the winged window open, framed in grey stone, looking down upon them like the very Goddess of Victory. The fresh wind whipped her long locks about her, a reality more beautiful than any poet's dream—one to live and die for—the Queen! Some wept for passion, for in that moment she was Scotland—she was all loves in one fair face.

The cry that broke forth, that resounded with manly music until the echoes took it up and carried it far into the hills to return it in fainter echoes, was never to leave her heart while it beat, for such moments are in their nature divine and eternal.

At Hamilton Castle, where they took her guarded like the jewel of the earth, before as many as she could crowd into the great hall she solemnly revoked her abdication, baring her arm that men might for themselves see the ineffaceable mark of Lindsay's iron gauntlet. She called on George Douglas—and the time-server Sir Robert Melville—to bear witness to the cruelty of that scene when abdication was wrung from her by threats. And Melville, seeing the tide turned, declared Lindsay's violence with loathing, until a deep hoarse murmur stirred the hall, and men clapped hands to sword swearing that Lindsay should pay for that deed of shame if they raked hell to find him.

So in place of the six lords who had condemned her to shame and imprisonment, a greater gathering of Scots peers

and gentlemen pronounced her abdication null and void, and all subsequent Acts by Moray and his peers null and void also. And false Moray sent cringing offers of negotiation until he could get word with Elizabeth and see what he might dare with her behind him—and hope and joy beat in the sad heart of Mary Stuart—until it seemed that the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose and sorrow and sighing had fled away.

So Mary Seton found her when, riding proudly with a guard of her father's men, she came laughing from Loch-leven.

"What! Detain the Queen's lady! With the Setons and Hamiltons out! Not they! When they had keys made to open the gates—for force them they could not—there was my boat waiting for me with cushions! Cushions, Madam, I would have you know! The old woman scowled in the background, but Sir William bowed like a gentleman and he said, said he: 'Thank God we are rid of a charge that disgraced us.' And so warmly, Madam, that I held out my hand and he kissed it. And the last I saw of the hag—her woman Erskine led her away half dead with fury and shame. So perish all the Queen's enemies."

CHAPTER XXIV

AT Greenwich, Elizabeth was engaged in one of the pleasantest negotiations of her life. Moray who naturally had learnt the great secret of diplomacy, "nothing for nothing and precious little for sixpence," had been anxiously considering how he could best placate the Great Lady from whose hand he fed so sparingly. He neither could nor would give her all she wanted. What she had used every art to gain and now demanded of him with a show of teeth behind her smile, was the person of the little Prince. With him Moray and the conspirators could not part. He constituted the sole right by which they could claim authority in Scotland. If Mary's escape brought about civil war he was the only flag they could fly. With Mary's jewels in his hands—magnificent jewels from France, the Scots crown jewels, and what not—Moray had sent splendid presents to Elizabeth, who as she said herself was growing readier to take than give as middle age hardened her iron. What on earth could he offer now?

Inspiration came upon him in the rifling of a box overlooked in the first plundering of his sister's possessions, for they had sacked every palace and hiding place, and his wife went brave in the Queen's jewels. This inspiration was the discovery of a treasure which might work the miracle of disposing Elizabeth to come to the rescue with English gold, which the confederates must have or go under once and for all.

It was done and the jewels sent by Sir Nicholas Elphinstone to London.

Lady Knollys, Elizabeth's handsome dark cousin, nicknamed by her the "Crow" had the first information, and rushed up to Her Majesty who was taking her ease in her inmost sanctuary with another lady high in her confidence parading before her. Mary Fitton was thus displaying a

gorgeous dress devised for the Queen for the approaching Court festivals, where she would appear in all her elderly beauty, and dazzle the eyes and senses of the youthful Duke of Anjou—the French suitor for her august hand—a man half her age.

The dress was of white satin in the French taste but exaggerated to suit that of Elizabeth. French fleurs-de-lis spotted it, in heavy gold bullion picked out with pearls, interspersed with golden peacocks, emerald-eyed and with tails so widely displayed that three covered the enormous front breadth of white satin—even as distended by the hoops and farthingale. A peacock garnished each sleeve in bullion, and the dress, stiff with gold and so heavy that it could not have been worn but for the stalwart aid of the farthingale, was finished with a giant ruff stiffened with pearls and brilliants completely hiding the head from the back view, but giving what Elizabeth considered a most effective background for the face from the front.

"It will be magnificent," she said meditatively. "My only question is—when I dance what the effect will be from behind? Stand further off that I may see!"

"Exquisite—exquisite, Madam!" cried pretty dark-haired Mary Fitton tottering under the weight of gold. "How could it be otherwise with all this magnificence? And there is a transparence in the ruff which will——"

"But it will hide my hair, and the small crown in brilliants, and the grace of the neck——"

"Nothing on earth can hide the grace of Your Majesty's neck," reiterated the almost desperate Mary Fitton. They had been debating the point for an hour. Mrs. Mary had been called upon to act model and parade about the room, ruff and all, and the Queen had shaken her head over the decapitation from a back view though she would not have the ruff lessened by an inch.

"Why, Madam," said Mrs. Mary audaciously, "it is only *my* neck you have seen in it—a stumpy thing that no man would look at twice! If you could see your own! I should like to know the ruff that would hide its beauty! Do not, I beseech you, judge this triumph by me, but think of it as on your own fairest person and——"

She felt she should drop if she stood a moment more. The weight of the dress, the growing irritability in the Queen's

ageing face, made the atmosphere thunderous and herself near her last gasp.

"Stand a moment more, Fitton, while I consider the carcanets! Rubies—yes—that will give colour, and a chain of emeralds will not be amiss to show them off. Why have I not something I have never worn—something that would be talked of in France! Depend upon it there will be greedy eyes in Anjou's suite to see what the English Queen can show her lover!"

Mary Fitton smiled: "If I know anything of men Your Grace's eyes and lips will so hold his gaze that he will not know a ruby from an emerald, and be sure he would rather clasp you in your smock than have this magnificence to hold him at an awful distance from the reward of his love."

This was quite in the tone which prevailed in Elizabeth's bed-chamber, and however much her women might laugh in private, they never failed to administer the dose and receive the reward of transient good temper. Elizabeth smiled as she looked at the pendant on her bosom presented by the adoring Anjou. She had called him her French frog in an access of tenderness, and accepting the jest he had had a wonderful frog manufactured in rubies with brilliant eyes, which she wore as a compliment to his ardour.

"You are a wild girl—but men are men," she said with would-be carelessness. "Still—I would wish something new—startling and costly—" Mary Fitton looked longingly at a chair, stifling a yawn. Suddenly, an interruption —an eruption, in fact! The privileged Lady Knollys who could do and say anything in Elizabeth's presence except tell her the truth, came trotting in with hurried curtsies.

"Madam, may I speak and hastily, for time presses? A delightful—wonderful bit of news reserved for Your Grace's ear first and foremost, beyond that of any other prince in Europe. O, Madam, such pearls!"

Elizabeth started.

"Pearls? And I have fewer of them than of any jewels. How? Where?"

Lady Knollys collapsed into a seat. She had scuffled up the great stairs until her breath scarcely sustained her portly figure.

"Madam," she gasped, "they are the Queen of Scots',

and my Lord Moray has sent them to Drew the jeweller, so much do the Lords need money. But, Madam, Drew has orders to offer them to Your Majesty at a price—O a nothing, a trifle—and you have but to choose and take, whether a part or all! O Madam, the beauty of them——"

"You have seen them?" Elizabeth asked jealously. "It is I who should have had the first view."

"Madam, yes, but I was charged to bring them to you for there must be no delay, and Drew had not the courage to ask an audience, especially since you misliked the turkey-stones he set in gold for the bracelet. May I show them?"

"Have them out at once, you fool of a Crow!" said Elizabeth graciously, using her pet name for her cousin. "And you, Mary Fitton, stand till I put them about your neck and see how they set off the satin. Hurry, Crow!"

Lady Knollys dived into the bosom of her stiff peaked dress and produced a silken parcel which, kneeling before Elizabeth, she unfolded on her yellow damask lap. The pearls made a dry tinkle as they poured out chain by chain, and the Queen came as near a shriek of delight as royalty could permit itself.

Six chains of great shimmering pearls strung rosary-wise, pearls with delicate iridescence shifting along their smooth and creamy skins, a-bloom with their sea-mystery. Great chains that hung low between the breasts, outlining them sensuously. Pearls as large as those of a fairy tale—or those which the Nereids gave to deck Aphrodite rising with her own dripping pearls from the sea.

Elizabeth hooked her fingers into them. They fell in festoons from her hands.

"Beautiful, most beautiful. I must have them," she murmured with such passion as when a poet or artist looks upon a great sunset. "Fortunate Crow! It is but now I said I needed something new, something to set off my rich French dress, and here it is. To think that that slut of Scotland should have such pearls and ours like mere peas!"

"But there is more, Your Majesty, more! A world's wonder!" cried the gasping Crow, holding up a chain so strange and beautiful that the Queen had never seen the like. Control herself as she would a little shriek of amazement broke from her rouged lips.

Black pearls—twenty-eight of them—large as muscatel

grapes and with the same purple bloom upon their mysterious beauty. Even Mary Fitton forgot exhaustion as she stooped to examine the wonder, and the farthingale tilting up behind showed off her scarlet-heeled shoes.

"They are mine if I had to pawn my other jewels to buy them!" Elizabeth said eagerly. "But I shall not, for Moray is so far indebted to me that he must let me have them for an old song. I know the history of those pearls. They were given her by the Queen-Mother when she was Queen of France, and I longed for them then on the mere story, and little thought they would ever be mine. But praise be to God my wisdom has put the Scotswoman at my feet. And if——"

Another interruption.

"My Lord of Leicester craves the joy of an audience with Her Majesty."

She visibly fluttered, adjusting the falling-ruff that it might disclose rather more of a white and beautifully-shaped bosom than the manners of the day quite approved. She called for a glass, dutifully supported by Mary Fitton and Lady Knollys, and arranged the stiff curls of a rampant red wig to fullest advantage. Mary Fitton touched her lips with red and bathed her hands in perfume, before she received the sharp order to be off and take off the dress and hide the pearls, and not till then was Leicester admitted—the only man, excepting Cecil on affairs of State, and Sir Christopher Hatton on a dawning *tendresse*, who had the happiness to be admitted into that inmost shrine of Gloriana Queen of Romance and Fairyland—"the fair vestal throned by the West"—as Shakespeare melodiously sang her.

Gloriana must be propitiated whatever the hurry of affairs. Kneeling, he kissed her hand with a lingering pressure which others suspected but could not know. He assured her her eyes were bright as the sun in his strength, terrible and beautiful as an army with banners. Solomon's Song of Songs was a mine of epithets in which he had dug with some profit. And then—while her white hand still caressed the short curls in his handsome neck he murmured that love's curse, business of State, stood at the door of that temple and would be admitted.

Instantly she stiffened. With that obscure and dangerous woman the brain seldom tripped over the heart. Rather

it kicked it away and forgot its existence. She motioned the lover to rise into the statesman, and instantly and obediently he transformed himself.

"What is it? Be brief."

"Madam, the Scots Queen has escaped from Lochleven and is with the Setons and Hamiltons, and an army. Scotland is rising for her."

She struck her hands together until the rings clashed.

"Moray! The fools, the fools! They should have murdered her sooner."

Lady Knollys echoed the cry of horror. Years of patient plotting and lying, bags of treasure spent in vain, men's honour and women's prostituted that the woman might be wrecked and ruined, and lo! She had broken the toils and was free! Elizabeth's hand shook a little—not with fear for that was not in her nature—but with fierce excitement.

"Is Robert Melville with her? Good—then we shall know all her thoughts. The fool believes and trusts all the world, prattles to everyone about her, trusting her fine eyes for conquest. This is damnable, but we shall get her yet. What is Moray doing?"

"Seeming to negotiate with her to gain time and implores Your Majesty for money—money or he is helpless."

"Will he sell me the prince's guardianship for money?" the Queen asked shrewdly—her hands clenched in one another, a favourite attitude when thought was questing in her quick brain.

"Not yet. Your Majesty sees that with the Queen let loose he cannot. The Prince is his hostage for authority. But later."

Leicester had his own interests and understandings with Moray as Cecil had also. Elizabeth by no means guessed all that went on in the counsels of her statesmen—if the gaudy Leicester deserved that name. They used and abused her as far as they dared—a thing that would have maddened her to guess.

"Has the Scots slut money?" (She used a coarser name). "I think she has not."

"None. Moray has his paw on her jewels, money, all. They pilfered her every jewel and ounce of silver. She is as poor as we could wish her, and has nothing wherewith to

feed or arm her men—nor the means to get it. If I dare prophesy to wisdom itself, I say she will be in the Highlands in a few days, and there they will guard her until they get Moray murdered and she can lay her hand on her wealth. It seems there are pearls which alone would bear the cost of a war. She aims at them and complains most bitterly of their loss. It is victory to her now if they were round her neck."

"By the passion of God she shall not have them. What! To make civil war and ruin her son and threaten England! The adulteress, the Jezebel—no!"

She beckoned to Lady Knollys, and the pearls were brought and poured into her lap, and Leicester opened eyes and mouth at their peerless glory. He pictured them about that slender throat where he had thought his own fingers would play—unseen in life—and yet not more beautiful in dreams than in truth. And they lay now in the lap of a hard, faded woman with cruel eyes who gloated on them less for their own beauty than for the ruin their loss meant to her rival.

So the deed was done and Mary's ruin completed. Could she have sold that treasure to the Lombard and Genoese merchants who competed for them she would have reigned in Edinburgh again for she had all else but money. Love, devotion, beauty, intellect, the nobility of a Queen, the faith of a saint, the gallant spirit to which all men responded. But money she had not, and ill-armed and fed, watched and reported by spies, her army melted away before the onslaught of Moray's men fed and armed by her own spoils and plundered treasures. Vainly she rode into the press of men like another Jeanne d'Arc, cheering her men, calling on them to advance. Vainly. And more, the spies of England and Moray had suborned some among them to seize her again and put her in the hands of the Lords. What could go well with one so fated?

Flight was the only hope, flight to her strong castle of Dumbarton frowning on rolling Clyde. But she was not to reach it. Lord Herries and a few gentlemen rode with her, Mary Seton behind her, and the two Douglases and a few brave hearts. On the day of her lost battle of Langside she rode sixty miles, and after that fled by night only.

As she wrote to her uncle the Cardinal of Lorraine:

"I have suffered injuries, calumnies, captivity, hunger, cold, heat, flying without knowing whither, ninety-two miles across the country without once stopping to dismount, and then lay on the hard ground having only sour milk to drink and oatmeal to eat, without bread, passing three nights with the owls."

When Brantôme who loved her beauty and gentleness heard the pitiful story he wrote with moistened eyes:

"I know several, especially the Queen-Mother, who were astounded that a princess so tender and delicate as the Queen of Scots was, and had been all her life, could have gone through all the hardships and sufferings she did on that occasion."

So fleeing, she came to Dundrennan Abbey where a council was held of such peers and gentlemen as could reach her. Lord Seton was absent—a prisoner and wounded. Fifty-seven of the Hamiltons had fallen, many others also, and her party was dispersed in flight, imprisonment, and death.

Seated in the vaulted gloom of the great refectory at Dundrennan, Mary received her friends for the last time, not with tears but settled composure, as one who has faced the utmost malice of fate and accepts it with resignation. No heroics, no threats or complaints. She rose with the tattered dress in which she had fled from fatal Langside, falling about her, royal and calm, and so faced them in the shadows—pale as the last ray of sunset in a cloudy sky, but still shining.

"My Lords and gentlemen, we have the courage to acknowledge defeat. For the present our hopes are dead and though I know, and you also, that Scotland would rise for the Stuart I will not expose brave men unarmed to face those whom my plunder has armed to rebel against me. They have means, we none. I might fly to the Highlands, yet only prolong a hopeless civil war. I might escape to France but will never enter as a beggar the country where I was once a Queen. What then is left me, believing as I do that Time the Father of Truth, will yet reveal my truth and honour even to my enemies? There is England."

As she pronounced that fatal word a shudder of horror ran through the men. There was not one who did not know a part of the plots, the cruelties and deceits fed by English lies and English gold, which had blighted the youth and royalty of the fairest most hopeful Sovereign who had ever sat upon the Scottish throne. Not one who did not realize the deadly hate, feminine and political, which swore Elizabeth to the destruction of her rival.

To Hamilton Archbishop of St. Andrews, and a true lover of her youth and trustfulness and beauty, she seemed the heroine of a Greek play, the sport of Destiny and the Furies —fated always to do noble, generous deeds—yet always to be hunted down and the brimming cup dashed from her lips. What mercy had life given her? No woman had ever more guiltlessly and bitterly suffered. Worse than widowed, a mother unmothered, her child turned into a spear for her breast, a Queen most tragically discrowned, she might have cried: "Whose sorrow is like unto my sorrow?"—and found no answer. And now England! The moment her clear voice had ceased to vibrate he rose to his feet and fixing his eyes on her spoke. She remained standing also, and the two figures in the hushed hall concentrated every thought.

"Madam, you are right. Civil war would break the heart of Scotland and lay her open to English misrule. We must wait, but with a passion of hope and trust such as never yet burnt in men's breasts. But where and how? That matter concerns us all more sharply than it concerns Your Majesty's self, for—we love you."

If his voice fluttered a moment it was under the heavy responsibility of saying all that her beauty, youth, and courage, her sorrowful destiny, meant to him and to all present. She was their daughter, their delight, the Lady of all their hopes and prayers. She was youth, romance—she was Scotland. If since her death she has been a lamping star, a fair moon floating unwon to all who read her story, what was she to those who saw her living loveliness and fought and died for her?

But he mastered himself and went on. "England, Madam—never! I implore Your Grace by the memory of all you and yours have suffered at England's hands, by the treacheries of her cruel Queen, by the wicked deeds of

Moray, by your ruined hopes, your child, and the one hope still left to you—do not cross the Border. Go to France. Wait there—in that dear land where you are still loved and honoured. But England—never. Never. NEVER."

He uttered those last words with the finality of doom, and all sprang to their feet and a deep hoarse murmur seconded his words. Men cursed England and Elizabeth aloud. They shouted, they prayed, imploring her to die rather than trust Elizabeth. They would face any odds. They would die to a man sooner than see her madly throw away her all. At last she waved her hand for silence ; and her voice clear and sweet as a bird's song after storm thrilled the hall.

"My friends, you do this Queen injustice. In my imprisonment she wrote with kindness and pity. She has promised me safety and shelter if I should need them. She has pledged herself in writing and by this diamond heart which I have regained and carry on my finger. She is a Queen crowned and anointed, and of my blood—and in the face of Europe, and of France especially—she dares not deny her pledge even if she would. She is negotiating her marriage with a French Prince—she dares not imperil her friendship there by injuring me who was Queen of France. No, I will see her and pour out my heart to her. I will show her Moray as he is in truth, and she will shudder to think she believed him. My friends, I strike a great stroke for Scotland in seeing my good sister and possessing her of the truth. Do not impede my will. Hear the letter I have written her and own that it binds her to my cause."

She read aloud the fatal letter amidst profound silence.

"You are not ignorant, my dearest sister, of a great part of my misfortunes ; but those which induce me to write at present have happened too recently to have reached your ear. I must therefore acquaint you as briefly as I can that some of my subjects, whom I most confided in and had raised to the highest pitch of honour, have taken up arms against me and treated me with the utmost indignity. By unexpected means the Almighty Disposer of all things delivered me from the cruel imprisonment I underwent, but I have since lost a battle in which most of those who preserved their

loyalty fell before my eyes. I am now forced out of my kingdom and driven to such straits that next to God I have no hope but in your goodness. I beseech you therefore, my dearest sister, that I may be conducted to your presence that I may acquaint you with all my affairs. In the meantime, I beseech God to grant you all heavenly benediction and to me patience and consolation, which last I hope and pray to obtain by your means. To remind you of the reasons I have to depend upon England I send back to its Queen this token of her promised friendship and assistance.

Your affectionate sister, Mary R."

She drew off her finger the diamond heart and laid it on the letter. Again a storm of horror and entreaty broke about her. Let her stay where she was. They swore to defend her for forty days in the Abbey itself if she would only stay until a calmer decision was possible. Or France? She shook her head, smiling but resolute. In Elizabeth was her last hope and she would not relinquish it. If she had been marble to Mary Seton's pleadings could she yield to these? For hours the dispute lasted until at last she sank back in her chair all but exhausted yet still resolute.

Through the window the English hills were withdrawing into twilight. To her excited imagination wearied with fatigues and hallucinations they seemed the hills of peace. She saw herself seated by Elizabeth hand in hand, confidence established between them, the bitter past undone, a generous ardour to right the wrong kindled in Elizabeth's cold heart, true sisters, vying with each only in glory and honour. She forgot her fatal youth and beauty, and the terrible question of the disputed succession, and all she knew of Elizabeth's vanity and hatred, and remembered only the blood-bond and the hope.

"I will go. I know a Queen's heart. I will go," she repeated gently but inflexibly, madly and incurably hopeful and trustful to the last.

"Then alone you shall not go," cried Lord Herries. "I will go too!"

Lord Fleming, the true-hearted, echoed him. The Douglases stood shoulder to shoulder. Lord and Lady Livingstone ranked themselves with them. Mary Seton

and Jane Kennedy smiled in silence. That needed no words.

Then slowly and silently the gathering dispersed, heavy with doubt and grief. The Queen had chosen. There was nothing more to be said—and little to be hoped. Yet her beauty and charm might conquer England—who could tell? She was the fairy Princess of all dreams and wonders, smiling above the waves of war. She might achieve the impossible. They kissed her hands, took her praises and blessings and went their ways wondering.

A few days later a fishing-boat waited by the Abbey Burnfoot, where the stream that flows past Dundrennan runs into the Solway Firth. Here once again the Archbishop of St. Andrews with others mustered round the Queen for the last desperate entreaty that she would stay with them, and trust to any earthly power rather than to Elizabeth. She put them away; the hills of England fair in sunshine called to her with soft deceitful welcome after her long griefs in Scotland.

So she stepped into the boat light as a girl, and sixteen faithful hearts followed her, while those as faithful remained to work for her in the country which had cast her out. Now a saddened woman of five and twenty, did she remember the day when as a girl of eighteen she had landed there from France half broken-hearted? She was glad to leave the bleak land of misery as she sat with eyes fixed on the new English hope. Hope at least was always good to her.

They pushed off. The sail took the wind. On a frantic impulse, the good Archbishop rushed in desperately, up to his breast in water, and gripped the side.

"Madam, it is not too late. Stay! Stay! I entreat. I implore!"

She leaned forward and laid her hand on his.

"Would you deprive me of my last hope?"

With tears in his eyes and speechless he looked up at her and dropped his hold. He had failed. He knew the weakness that made her adorable and yet meant utter ruin, not for the first time but now most terribly for the last. She was driving the sword into her own heart. He turned away weeping while she smiled and waved her hand.

The light wind took the sail softly and drifted her through surf to the calm expanse beyond. It set fair for England

and now there was no return. She saw the little group on the shore waving, kneeling, praying, the Archbishop in their midst—the true Hamilton! And suddenly deadly doubt pierced her soul with a chill like death. But it was too late. The English hills shone fair. She turned and looked her last on Scotland, and presently mist dimmed it, and it had faded and was one with the past.

CHAPTER XXV

AS the boat's bow grated on English soil hope glittered in Mary's undaunted soul. A new world to conquer. New hearts to win and the certainty that she could win them, from Elizabeth down to the lowliest boy or girl who stopped to stare at the strange fisher-boat with its crowd of wearied men and women and that one who rose, topping the others and looking out from under her hand to see the Sunday folk passing to and fro on their quiet ways. Such cargoes did not come from Scotland nor in such boats, and word was hurriedly sent to the lord of the manor, Sir Henry Curwen, that ladies were grouped upon the beach. He snatched his velvet cap with the short curled feather in the brim and strode down through the pleasant glades of Workington Hall to see what might be a-gate. Ladies! Could they be the survivors of some wrecked barque in the treacherous Solway Firth? Workington Hall had large hospitality and good food to back it in the fine old English fashion for wanderers who needed a helping hand. His dogs ran about him as his strong steps went swiftly down the wood-ways—not an eye or a sniff for a rabbit when an expedition with the master was in the wind! He shouted over his shoulder to the gentle round-faced Lady Curwen that guests were at hand, and left her busy at her orders when the inner garden gate closed behind him.

It was a mild Sunday with a westering sun, the warmth of Spring in the air, wholesome with new greenery and budding flowers. Sir Henry looked round him on his broad acres nesting by the glittering Firth, and thought of this goodly lot and fair heritage. Quiet. Peace. Nothing to mark the soft unhurried change from day to day except the growth of his children, of flowering trees in the garden, and gentle transition of the seasons. The Court had never

interested him. He accepted the occupant of the throne as he accepted the teachings of the Reformed Church without question or interest. A kindly easy-going man, well reported of to Elizabeth, and therefore left in peace in the stormy North which held its own opinions and was to declare them soon.

Steps came running behind him, a fair-faced lad of seventeen too old to be his son—full of life and zest to see something new—his nephew, a fine promising youth of the allied Camden family, with a taste for scribbling in odd corners when he might have been drawing a badger or at the heels of a fox. A lad later to be famous.

"Take me with you, uncle. If it should be a wreck—that's stuff for my stories."

The men of the party—for there were men—seemed to be busy helping the fishermen with the boat and certain packages they were getting ashore. The women stood together, and as Sir Henry and Camden came up, one detached herself from the group and advanced.

She was more than common tall, slender as a young birch-tree, with a kind of radiant youthfulness which no weariness could dim. Beautiful—the male in both of them acknowledged that, however shyly Camden's youth took it, but much more than beautiful, for dark eyes and sweet lips were set off with dignity and gentle majesty, expressing some inward loveliness in the woman of which eyes and lips were only the outward expression. Yet all this, striking young Camden dumb, did more for Sir Henry. It perplexed him exceedingly with a sense of confusion. Had he seen the beauty before? If so, where? The clear fine line of her brow and haughty little nose, softened by the radiant smile of the lifted upper lip disclosing its row of pearls were familiar, yet strange. Her dress—a tattered silk once white, now like Joseph's coat of many colours with stains and soil, was strange indeed. Her voice, soft and golden with a delicate touch of the Scots accent, was strange also to him. She spoke with perfect assurance.

"Sir, I do not know you, but I see an English gentleman. I am the Queen of Scots, and I have sought refuge from my rebels in my good sister's kingdom of England."

Light had broken upon him and effaced the rest. There were few men of gentle birth in the North who had not fed their eyes upon the pictured beauty of the Northern Queen, who would probably be their own one day. Her loveliness and the wild romance of her story had set many an English heart beating since she came from France to reign across the Border. Down on his knees he fell and kissed the hand she stretched out to him, and Camden blushing scarlet to his ears with excitement followed. Her ladies closed up behind her, and a noble-looking man came hurrying up and announced himself as Lord Herries.

"Worthy sir, can you direct us to any place where Her Majesty can find a resting place until Her English Majesty arranges their meeting? We have come in great haste and unprovided that they may meet——"

Sir Henry sprang to his feet.

"My lord, there is Workington Hall, and my wife and mother at Her Majesty's service, and I am Sir Henry Curwen. We are unworthy of such an honour yet know it as one. Run, Camden, run and prepare them, and send the coach down in hot haste."

"I thank you, Sir Henry, with all my heart," she caught him up, "but no coach. If it is near, let us walk and talk as we go. No need to wait and I am eager to know my generous host."

Camden legging it like a deer through the glades felt his heart swell with the beauty and mystery of this sudden and most royal appearance. So Queens should look and no otherwise—mysteriously dark-eyed with a smile of enchantment that ravished the soul, and soft stateliness which ensured obedience for delight's sake. The royal lovely lady! What wonder that men had died for a look or smile! Should he dare to speak to her? His lips yet felt the warmth of her hand. And who was that Scots boy who walked so close behind her, darting glances right and left as if to intercept any that might fall too audaciously upon the Queen? Could that be the famous Douglas page who had freed her from Lochleven? Silly boor! And that other young man—haughty and fair-haired, who held his head like a stag and looked about him—despising boys who had never seen the world, and had no deeds and stories to tell by

winter fires—who could he be, and what had he done to entitle him to such pride? Could that be George Douglas of whom men spoke? So he fled onward and with a shout roused the Hall to some purpose.

But on the dazzled and astounded Sir Henry new and bewildering thoughts were crowding as his guest went beside him sweetly laughing, talking sweet-voiced with him and with Herries on her other hand. This was an event of the first political importance. He must not keep it to himself for an hour, for a minute; even now messengers should be speeding to London with the news, and the Earl of Northumberland, the proud Percy, Lord of Cockermouth Castle, pre-eminent and ruling prince in the neighbourhood would claim the right of knowledge. On that thought he stopped, courteously asking the Queen's leave, and calling up a young man sent a verbal message in hot haste to the great man.

Suddenly, and for the first time also, there flashed into his mind the reputation of the woman he was welcoming. She was accused by her subjects of murder, the treacherous murder of her husband, not indeed with her own hand but by direct inspiration of the deed. And this murder had been committed by a man who had abducted her with her own consent and carried her off to his castle of Dunbar, where she had lived with him in open shame. She had married him three months after the miserable death of her husband, and the guilty pair had only been separated by the armed intervention of the Lords headed by her bastard brother Moray, who had imprisoned her in Lochleven whence she had escaped to raise civil war in Scotland. At this very moment it rang through England that the Lords had discovered a silver casket containing her guilty and loathsome love-letters to the murderer!

This was the story told in the world's ear, this was the woman to whom he had offered the homage of his wife and mother and the shelter of his roof! What had he done? But what else could he do? Queens cannot be left unsheltered in a strange land. He wished now that Northumberland was there to relieve him of responsibility, and for a second meditated the possibility of calling his coach and depositing her at Cockermouth in the Percy's custody

leaving a greater than himself to wrestle with the problem.

Yet when he looked at her—could it be possible? Her simple dignity, the gentle grace with which she turned to Mary Seton and Lady Livingstone to include them in the story of the adventure in the fishing-boat, her frank gratitude to himself, swept away prejudice as a thing unclean and impossible. He had never felt so proud of the sylvan glories of his park as when she stood under the great beech and looked up to where its towering greenery met the sky with swaying leaves, or paused with upraised finger as an orange-billed blackbird fluted from the great elm by the house. And when, as the house came in sight, dreaming of past centuries on its great lawns with the lengthening shadows like pools of blue water about it, she stopped to say: "Lovely—most lovely!"—his kindly heart would have assured him of her innocence if all the world had cried: "Guilty." Such women are neither wantons nor tigresses. That much a man may swear!

An hour later the much perturbed Northumberland had galloped over from Cockermouth with a train of men-at-arms, had sent a flying post to London and posted his guards about the house—requesting an audience. Mary Seton came gliding out of the great bedroom hurriedly improvised for the Queen, with a finger on her lip and a whispered message.

"My Lord, Her Majesty sleeps. She has undergone such weariness and fatigue that I dare not wake her. She is clean exhausted,"—and was gone as she uttered the last words.

The Earl, Sir Henry, and his wife and mother stood in the great withdrawing-room and looked at each other, with Camden dodging behind to hear.

The Percy shook his head dubiously.

"This is a most grave matter, and what our Queen will say it would ill become me to guess. It is scarcely for her pure ears to be affronted with this lady's misdeeds, which indeed if true stink in men's nostrils and——"

"But they are not true!" cried meek little Lady Curwen ruffling up like a hen in defence of its chickens. "No one could look at her and believe one word against her—a sweet

good woman if ever I saw one, and her little prince the same age as my John! Furthermore, my Lady Livingstone and Mistress Mary Seton speak of her as an angel of gentleness, and yet commend her high heart and courage that nothing can daunt. And, as for beauty!" She raised her open hands to heaven as if calling it to witness that none such was ever seen on earth.

"And look, my Lord, what Her Majesty gave me!" cried young Camden coming up before them to display a small gold medal hanging from a slender chain. "She said it was for my swift running to do her service, and that when she was a girl she ran as swiftly as her Maries, and Mistress Seton laughed and said it was true. And I will keep it, and dash my fist in the face of any man who slanders a lady so lovely and true."

The old story! She gathered hearts in her hands as a maid gathered flowers and, though indeed it must be owned she willed it, could not have done otherwise. Northumberland took the medal and examined it with curiosity.

"This is a great treasure, my lad!" he said gravely. "Have a care of it. Look, Sir Henry! It is a wedding medal of her marriage with my Lord Darnley. See! '*Henricus et Maria* by the grace of God, King and Queen of Scotland.' I must say it is hard to believe she would carry such a thing with her were the stories true that the rebel Lords tell. But what our Queen will say of her coming hither passes my knowledge, for I think her royal heart is firmly set against her."

The elder Lady Curwen shook her head sadly.

"God forbid! Yet I fear it! The sweetest lady! And kissed me like a daughter with the tears in her poor wearied eyes. She is in mere tatters with riding from the battle, and my daughter and I have given what we could to her and her ladies, but our Queen must send more and generously. And here is a letter, my Lord, which she has written to be sent to our Queen, and surely one more piteous was never written by any woman—not to speak of a great Princess. She bid me read it and you also."

Northumberland read it aloud—young Camden pushing up to his elbow to hear, his heart in his eyes. What could

he do for this Queen of Hearts to rival what young Willie Douglas had triumphantly achieved? He hated the very thought of that audacious lad—now munching English roast beef in the dining-room—and viewing all round him including Camden with cool disparaging Scots eyes.

"My good sister and cousin,

I entreat you to send for me as soon as possible for I am in a pitiable condition not only for a Queen but a gentlewoman, having nothing in the world but the clothes in which I escaped riding sixty miles the first day and not daring to travel afterwards except by night, as I hope to be able to show you if it please you to have compassion on my great misfortunes and permit me to come and bewail them to you. Not to weary you I will now pray God to give you health and long and happy life, and to myself patience, and that consolation I await from you to whom I present my humble commendations. From Workington, this 17th May, your very faithful and affectionate good sister and cousin and escaped prisoner,

Marie R."

"It should move our Queen to great compassion," Northumberland said folding it thoughtfully. His swarthy handsome face had a touch of unusual emotion under its mask of reserve. Could some soothsayer have revealed to him that he was to risk his life, his wealth, his all, and finally to lose his head as the reward of his belief in her innocence, would he have stopped his ears to "the sea-maid's music"—the siren song that Shakespeare has touched for the world's remembrance?

He saw her next day and as he knelt before her that something within him which no man can command vowed itself to the service of the lovely stranger who should have been his Queen if right had its own. Why not? King and Parliament had made Elizabeth illegitimate, and this lady was the rightful heir of Plantagenets and Tudors.

He removed her next day to his castle of Cockermouth,

jealous of her stay for a moment under any roof but his own, vowed to her cause though silently. But she knew it and gladdened. Surely it was her business as it was her pleasure to win these English hearts for herself and her son, and in his eyes, in the tremble of his voice, in the perturbed devotion of young Camden and Sir Henry and the eagerness of his wife and mother to serve her, she read her success too well.

Mary Seton shook a warning head and vainly: "Madam, what will the Queen say?"

The other Mary could not hide her little laugh of triumph.

"How shall she know? They will not tell."

"Deeds will tell, Madam, and you wish it so. You wish their support. They will pay dear, dear, for it and you also. O that you had never come here!"

The Queen would have none of this.

"Little fool! I am glad I came. They did not know me in England. Now they shall and it will run like wild-fire through the North, and I will win my sister's heart as I win theirs, and we will be like true sisters! I will woo her every way!"

There were times when her ignorance and hope were incredible.

"Birds in a nest!" mocked Mary Seton with a smile not merry. "And you will make a good Catholic of her, and she will leave you the kingdom, and go into a nunnery and forswear Leicester and—O Madam, use their devotion this minute to get you back to Scotland while yet you may! This minute!"

She laughed and would hear no more.

"I will to be Queen of Hearts now, and Queen of England if I outlive her."

Two days later she held a court at Cockermouth for all the ladies round who were mad to see the world's beauty. They crowded in, headed by Lady Scrope, sister to the Duke of Norfolk who was later to offer her his hand and Dukedom, and whom Elizabeth was to make shorter by a head for his pains. She received them—a white rose, soft-petalled and sumptuous in the white brocade which had been the wedding robe of little Lady Curwen, draped with old lace from the elder lady's store to fit her stately height, and so smiling

and raying sweet influences upon them there was not one but protested her worthy to be the world's Queen as well as England's ; only the more cautious whispering that they doubted whether her English Majesty would welcome so fair a pretender across the Border. It would be better to see all but say little until that Majesty's pleasure was known. The men were less cautious.

Two days later Sir Richard Lowther, Deputy Governor of Carlisle Castle, claimed the honour of housing her, and having removed her there with her suite, the jealous Earl of Northumberland, fired with all the spirit of the Percys, drew his sword on Lowther, and in right of his office of Lord Warden, claimed her again for Cockermouth. Why had he yielded ? He would not yield.

" You varlet—you—a man of too low birth to pretend to such a grace and honour ! We will house her at Cockermouth ! "

Fair Helen was as usual bringing fire and sword to Troy, and Hector and Paris had already unsheathed their blades and were at each other's throats. They were separated with difficulty and only by her soft entreaties. So it was throughout the North. Every Catholic man looked out his sword and armour, and considered his charger and the day at hand. Every Catholic woman was on her knees before the crucifix praying for the rightful Sovereign at last come home to them—the true Queen—rightful heir of the seventh Henry. And Elizabeth in London, reading Mary's letter, with Cecil on his knees to hear the great news, knew as well as they what thought was in their hearts, and afterwards, while condoling with upraised hands with the French Ambassador on the troubles of the Scots Queen, sent racing orders to Carlisle that : " especial diligence should be used to prevent the Queen of Scots or any of her company from escaping."

Escaping ! Thus easily had the spider woven her web and the golden fly walked into it. What Elizabeth could never accomplish for herself the Scots Queen had done for her.

" Was ever such a fool ! " she said to Leicester. " You did well indeed in escaping such a marriage, for the man that has a fool to his wife——"

" Madam, I never desired it," Leicester answered deal-

ing with the glance amorous that moved her most. "It was your own dear wish, and though it cut me to the heart's core I would not have faltered. But now I thank God for my freedom to love where I love for love's sake only."

CHAPTER XXVI

MEANWHILE the position of the English noblemen and gentlemen in the North was alternately pathetic and ludicrous. They knew not how to deal with either Majesty—the one so beautiful and winning that to insult or distress her was a horror to them—the other so harsh and suspicious that the slightest hesitation might be their ruin. Only of one thing could they be certain, that had Mary been guilty of any crime it was not to England she would have fled, where Darnley's powerful relations had the means and will to have all her doings investigated. Nor dared she have trusted Elizabeth to whom her disgrace was worth much fine gold. This certitude gained her many friends.

It was obvious that as a first step the young Queen must be provided with garments, and accordingly Lord Scrope and Sir Francis Knollys were made bearers of a box from Greenwich with what they supposed to be a goodly store of splendour for her use chosen from Elizabeth's own over-elaborate wardrobe.

Comedy hand in hand with Tragedy smiled on the scene, when in the presence of the expectant Mary Seton that box was opened by their attendants, the two gentlemen responsible standing gravely by to await her gratitude. The package disclosed itself as stuffed with rags and sheets, two old shifts, two pairs of shoes, and a few pieces of old black velvet. That was all. The expression of haughty disgust on Mary Seton's face as she turned away needed no words, and sent the two gentlemen to their ashamed and contrite apologies—Sir Francis Knollys catching her dress to stop her exit. The honour of England! The generosity of an English Queen to a Queen and her cousin! No—he must take it on himself!

"It is a mistake, madam, a very grievous mistake and

my own folly, for I must have told the lady-in-waiting so clumsily of your Queen's needs, that she fancied they were for one of this Queen's maids. There is no other explanation and you will readily understand and forgive. No slight—nothing is intended."

Mary Seton detached her dress and departed speechless. Not so the world, which cackled with laughter and scorn when the Spanish Ambassador imparted the news of Elizabeth's queenly liberality to Catherine of France and to his own Court. It was the jest of Europe and Elizabeth smarted for it. Mary at least forgave, smiling untroubled, and waved the subject aside.

"A trifle! I will send to my Lord of Moray for my own garments as is but right. My sister should not have been vexed with this nothing."

But there the tangle could not end, and the two Commissioners unfortunately remained to manifest an interest in the fugitive and her doings, which caused fresh fury at Court—Elizabeth eagerly devouring every scrap of gossip which could reach her from Carlisle, while she held secret councils to determine what best use could be made of the fatuous, the unexampled folly which had put her worst enemy in her power.

Every person who came near the distracting Queen appeared to lose his senses one way or another. Young Camden already dreamed of writing that history still extant in which she shines innocent and proud, true heroine of royal drama. Sir Henry Curwen and his family rued the day when they had not warned her to escape while escape was yet possible—as guiltily unhappy as if they had contrived her ruin. The Percy was deep in plots to free her from the net he knew too well was closing upon her. Sir Francis Knollys's stiff gravity had given way to passionate interest in matters which Elizabeth angrily declared should concern no man of his age. He was writing utter follies to Court, and hearing them from his wife, her Crow, how could Elizabeth stop or believe her senses even while she consumed them with furious curiosity? Thus he actually wrote:

"Mistress Mary Seton is praised by this Queen to be the finest dresser of hair that is to be seen in any country, of which we had various experience since her

coming hither, and yesterday she set upon the Queen a curled hair that showed very delicately, and every other day has a new device of head-dressing without any cost and yet becoming a woman gaily well."

This was bad enough but unfortunately it was not only the outward woman that won and held the approbation of Sir Francis.

"We found her in her answers to have an eloquent tongue and a discreet head, and it seems by her doings she has stout courage and a liberal heart. After our delivery of Your Highness's letter, with the water in her eyes, she complained that Your Highness did not answer her expectation for admitting her to your presence forthwith."

And again he wrote very seriously to Cecil with a closer and (could it be) a dazzled analysis ?

"This Lady and Princess is a remarkable woman. She seems to care for no ceremonious honour besides the acknowledgment of her royalty. She speaks much, is bold, pleasant and friendly. She shows great desire to be avenged on her enemies and readiness to expose herself to all perils in hope of victory. She delights to hear of courage and heroism, praising by name all the brave men of her country even if they are her enemies, and she will praise no cowardice even in her friends. The thing she thirsts for is victory so that for its sake, pain and perils seem pleasant to her and wealth and such things contemptible. Now what is to be done with such a lady ? And whether such a lady should be nourished in one's bosom or whether it is good to wait and dissemble with her I refer to your judgment."

Judgment ! Even Cecil was nonplussed and Elizabeth helpless. Anxiety grew on her as man after man sent like Balaam to curse remained to praise. What could be done when they wrote thus of the beguiler ?

"I commend it as wisdom that few subjects should

be permitted to see or have talk with this lady, for besides that she is a goodly personage (and yet in truth not comparable to our Sovereign) she has with it an alluring grace, a pretty Scots accent and a searching wit tempered with mildness. Fame might move some to relieve her, and glory joined to gain might stir others to adventure much for her sake."

Even that bracketed exception could not close Elizabeth's panic-stricken eyes. The men were charmed, dazzled! And again:

"She displays the utmost magnanimity and a great and virtuous mind in the midst of evils and adverse fortunes."

Horrible! Now how was she to bear the presence of such a rival, in her opinion more dangerous than any at large? How deal with charms which might ravish the kingdom from her grasp if they were permitted to work their evil spell upon her subjects? She darted at the nearest sharpest weapon. She threw herself into more urgent communication with Moray, snatching at every scrap of malodorous scandal, eagerly plotting a Commission to examine the silver casket love-letters to Bothwell which the Scots Lords gladly thrust upon her, and refusing to see Mary until her character should be sufficiently cleared, to enable the Crowned Vestal to meet the alleged adulteress and murderess without contagious danger. It was vain for Mary and the French and Spanish Courts to assert her rights as a Sovereign in no way amenable to the English laws. The coil of intrigue enwound her delicately but firmly. Elizabeth, loathing and distrusting Moray, yet worked with him relentlessly and with cat-like cunning to the foreseen end. Mary was never to see her face to face, was never to be confronted outright with charges she could disprove. Never to see the casket letters herself. A poisoned miasma of calumny was to surround her which should paralyse her struggles and poison her very image in the eyes of men.

Slowly and steadily between the Queen and Moray the plan was formed and consolidated which would doom Mary not only to life-long imprisonment, but to the shame which

hangs about her memory still for those who have not the means or patience to unravel the threads of the long and closely woven intrigue. It required all the feline skill of Elizabeth and her advisers to reconcile her strong sense of the rights of kings with the determination to wreck Mary and make her a State prisoner. But it was done.

As the faithful Melville writes of these strange opposites to be reconciled in the mind of Elizabeth:

> "The Queen of England having obtained her will had great contentment. She was glad of the Queen's dishonour, but she detested in her mind the Regent (Moray) and all his company."

None but the deeply instructed in the secret history of her reign can tell the means whereby Elizabeth despising her tools yet "obtained her will;" nor recount the long investigation where she made herself judge of the foul "casket" letters supposed to be written by Mary to Bothwell in Darnley's lifetime. They were a magnificent pretext, and with cruel skill were drawn over years, during which the fetters were locked more firmly on the prisoner's hands. Elizabeth and her ministers themselves were only supplied with copies of broad Scots translations of the alleged French, and knew from the beginning that the letters were false as Moray and Lethington themselves. But yet, when finally the farce broke down, Elizabeth with scarcely disguised pleasure caused Cecil to write to Moray the words which for ever clear Mary Stuart of the charges of adulterous passion for Bothwell and of Darnley's murder.

Cecil wrote that: "There had been nothing sufficient produced nor shown by them against their Sovereign, whereby the Queen of England could conceive or take any evil opinion of the Queen her sister for anything she had seen."

So much for the Lords! But did it help the prisoner? No—Elizabeth had studied the moves of the game now and played it well. She and Cecil moved with ruthless skill. A new pretext was always ready when the last had failed, and slowly, coldly, certainly, the meshes of the net entangled the victim.

She struggled for life and freedom, and that was a per-

petual crime they could use against her. In her wild beautiful letters to Elizabeth no dry dust of the centuries can blot out the essential life and truth. The beating of a royal heart quickens all hearts that feel the blood draining away slowly through an unstaunched wound, the piercing wrathful cry of innocence outraged and justice trampled, pain exceeding all other pains of earth. It drove her to God —if she needed driving but she did not, for always the Unseen had walked by her. Now certitude strengthened as the world lifted its painted veil upon the worthlessness it had hidden. But the charm of the letters is their blood-tinctured humanity, their youth and strange innocence and belief that the impossible may yet be possible, the false true. She was always the victim of men though their ruin, and it is this that singles her out from other women who have been sovereign in men's hearts in all the history of the world. Immeasurable belief, burning hope of youth which can never see itself beaten in the struggle for its will or realize that inflexible denial opposes its cry for joy, live in those marvellous letters and light them with a ray immortal as the passionate courage which illumined the Calvary trodden by her bleeding feet in England. They place her among the great women-writers of the world. Drama and beauty brim them, and the contrast between them and Elizabeth's intricate efforts to express her tortuous thought is an epitome of the characters of the two women.

In the darkness she had sometimes alleviations dear as a bright shaft of sunlight. There were those in Scotland and in France who wept for such a bird in such a cage. Ronsard could never forget that tortured beauty. When she had been fifteen years in prison he published a book of poems which the world will not forget, and dedicating it to her sent her a copy. Sitting by her solitary prison window she read the concluding lines with Mary Seton kneeling beside her, and tears were in the eyes of both remembering that beloved France where all her joy lay buried, and the man who was the very music of its chivalry in the days of her glad youth.

> She, courteous as she is, O happy book!
> Receiving thee with bright rejoicing look

And outstretched hand, in gracious tone shall ask,
"How Ronsard does, and what his present task?"
Then answer for me—"No employ can be
So sweet to him in life as pleasing thee."

For a moment the flame of beauty burned in her sunken eyes. Was it a prophecy of how she must shine eternally among the few loveliest and most unhappy whom the world has taken to its heart for ever?

Also there came a thing strange in its own beauty though of a very different order. The heart of Darnley's mother had smitten her in thinking of the lying accusations of her son's murder, brought against his innocent wife. She herself was imprisoned in the Tower by Elizabeth's implacable hatred. Had it taught her the bitterness of injustice—the grief of those who have no redress? There sitting in the menacing gloom of that terrible prison, the old Countess of Lennox with her failing eyes worked a little square of the rare and beautiful lace known as *point tresse*, made of her own hair silvered with grief and woven by the needle with fine flax thread, and sent it to Mary. If that square, robbed from the Queen at Chartley, could be discovered, what would it not be worth to those who can estimate sorrow and repentance? Over it fell the tears of Mary. Here was the testimony more precious to her than crowns, that the mother of Darnley had nothing but trust in the woman whose hope her son had broken. There came a letter of consolation also:

"I beseech Your Majesty fear not, but trust in God that all shall be well. The treachery of your traitors is known better than before."

Yes, but too late. No repentance, no tears could wash out the ruin wrought upon the most generous of women. On the window of her prison she wrote with a diamond the famous distich which sums up her life and character.

From the top of all my trust
Mishap hath laid me in the dust.

Nothing remained but the inextinguishable hope of the spirit.

There was no hope for her in England. There too the ministers of Elizabeth dreaded the succession of the Scots Queen against whom they had sinned the unpardonable sin, who, as her traitors in Scotland also dreaded, might tear from their clutches the robbed lands once dedicated to the Church and the poor. She was a doomed woman from the moment she set foot in England, and Moray and Cecil were brothers in their purpose. The end would be cruelly long in coming but it was sure.

CHAPTER XXVII

NINETEEN long years after her fatal flight to England the sorrowful tale of Mary's grievous imprisonment was drawing to a close. Elizabeth thirsted for her blood but had no courage to execute an independent Sovereign, her cousin and one who had fled to her for safety on repeated promises of help. To take her life was to challenge every Sovereign and send a shuddering horror through Europe. She herself had declared it "a crime which honour and conscience forbade," and she dared not make herself the blackleg among monarchs. Day by day she and Cecil (now Lord Burleigh) and Walsingham—her "Spirit" and her "Moon" as she nicknamed them after her fashion with men—consulted with Secretary Davidson as to how Mary could be done to death with least scandal; Elizabeth secretly hoping that her Spirit and her Moon would lift the responsibility from her and both Spirit and Moon steadfastly resolving against it. They knew her subtlety. Not for nothing had her godson Jack Harrington said with a jest:

> "Her wise men were often sorely troubled to know her well so covertly did she pass her judgment. And when the business turned to advantage she most cunningly set down the good issue to her own honour, but when anything fell out contrary to her will the Council were hard put to it to defend their action without blemishing the Queen's good judgment."

Her disconcerting and sudden turns upon them terrified every man-jack of them of responsibility, and anything they could get done they always did with cunning that made the Court a nest of dangerous intrigue. But all were agreed that if a way could be found Mary must die, and her son

left in the hands of England, whether in or out of Scotland, if there were to be any hope of the ultimate union of the island. While Mary lived the Catholics would hope, and the rebellions and plottings in England had proved that men would stake their lives for her as readily as a coin at cards. Mary protested that directly or indirectly she had never struck at Elizabeth's life in spite of her ceaseless plots to escape, but none the less she was the handle of every dagger, the trigger of every pistol pointed at it. And none the less she and all men knew that in the union of the two kingdoms lay the sole hope for both. Die of her prison hardships she would not. They had tried rigorous imprisonment in rooms where the damp oozed from the walls and the stench from cess-pits infected the air. They had condemned to dull inaction without air or exercise a body as free and eager as the hawk's on a wind, they had added mental torture with every refinement of cruelty, and they could not kill her that way. Her clean blood and valorous spirit kept life in her, but it destroyed Mary Seton's blithe health and sparkle, and reduced her to a crawling invalid who could no longer lift a finger in her darling's service and faced certain death if she stayed to share her miseries. No words can paint the agony of parting between those two. With Mary Seton went the royal Mary's youth and dreams, a love which had refused all lover's love, all the joys of life asking no reward but love's self. Their parting was all but speechless. They looked in each other's eyes and clung together dry-eyed.

At last Mary Seton said choking: "When you come to France——" and the other shook her head. She was past all words, and Mary Seton departed to the quiet convent at Rheims where the Princess Renée de Lorraine, her Queen's aunt, ruled as abbess. She had no more desire for a world which could so misuse all beauty, grace and loyalty. There she prayed for her Mary until death took her, and since each true prayer is a draft on the power of the universe who shall say hers were useless?

But to Mary Stuart all things grew sadder one by one, and as they did so Elizabeth's difficulties increased. She had always warned Elizabeth with her own strange frankness that she would escape if she could, and as each plot to deliver her failed another followed it. By her long and

wicked plotting in Scotland Elizabeth had brought herself into a position from which there was no retreat, and the more she maltreated her prisoner the heavier her own troubles grew. In Scotland was no peace either. Mary's party was strong; the men who loved her still active. Moray and nearly all the conspirators in her ruin had very early met with the terrible ends they deserved. He, Lethington, Morton, Kirkaldy of Grange and others had long since gone to their dark assize by the road of well-earned assassination. Elizabeth had lost her tools there, and worse—Mary's son James—now growing a lad of reflective and reasoning mind, began to show most unwelcome interest in his mother's imprisonment and bitter fate. He had read Bothwell's dying declaration of her innocence of all the imputed crimes. His blood, chilled by calumnies of his mother, kindled in the reading, and there too Elizabeth feared for the future with a fear intensified by the memory of her own treasons.

So the end was decreed, but the means cost her nerve-racking panic after panic of doubt and fear. It was easy to order thirty-four Commissioners to sit on the case of the Queen of Scots. She could appoint them herself—bitter angry Protestant men, carefully chosen for the certain vote they would give. On that point there was no difficulty, and the sentence of death was a foregone conclusion. But did it help matters? They could send and announce her sentence brutally to the victim, but it took the thing no further. They could not touch her life—bluster as they would—without Elizabeth's signature to the death-warrant, and that signature she dared not give. Dared not. On that all turned.

The French Ambassador was driving her mad with his pleas for mercy, his open threats of French disgust and fury certain to culminate in vengeance and European disgrace. Could she believe him—were they bluffing? Leicester thought—swore—they were. She had only to persevere and "dead women do not bite!" But live Frenchmen do, and violent Scotsmen have daggers, and her own conscience, hardy enough, God knows, but shuddering now with superstition, sided with them. After all—had her father made so great a success of his butcherings of men and women to buttress his throne? Blood?—he had waded

through it to secure his posterity, and his son young Edward was dead, rotted with consumption, his barren daughter Mary dead of dropsy, and she herself a sapless old woman—now hesitating over a bloody deed to secure her crown, knowing she could not trust the men about her, huckstering already with the heir. No—not one.

She was alone—horribly. And none could share her responsibility. She doubled like a fox. She turned like a hare with the hounds on her. Wolf-faced Davidson, and white-fanged Burleigh and vulpine Walsingham—and who cared for her ? And then Mary wrote to her a letter terrible and beautiful, and for a dreadful moment the whole past surged on her like a bursting wave. Could she have trusted her ? Could they have been friends ? Was all the torture wasted ? No—no. That she could never believe. But she sat with the letter before her and wept.

At Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire Mary had been refused even the aid of a secretary, and had defended herself for days against the charge of attempted murder of her oppressor which was to lead her to death. "Alas, how many learned counsellors are here, and none for me!" she had said. She owned her many attempts to escape. Was it not natural ? A bird will fly its cage if it can. But she resolutely denied all plots for Elizabeth's death, and appealed to the English Parliament for judgment on her evidence, and that expedient they could not dare. Their case was too weak, and they had learnt long since that Commissions are by no means final.

But the time had come when the long and tragic farce must end. They would have no more. A deputation of the Privy Council was sent to prepare her for death. She heard them calmly, making a formal protest of her innocence and the sovereignty which should have protected her from such outrage, then watched while they hung her bed and presence-chamber with funereal black, bidding her consider herself no longer as a Queen but as a dead woman.

Left alone, she wrote that famous letter to Elizabeth, high in thought and beautiful exceedingly. Not if the genius of Shakespeare had composed it as a valediction for a great and heroic soul facing the agony of bloody death, could the light and strength of genius more illumine it than in the words that flowed from Mary's heart to her royal hand.

"Madam, I have with difficulty gained leave from those to whom you have committed me to open to you all I have on my heart. You will credit or disbelieve me as it seems best to you. I am resolved to strengthen myself in Christ Jesus alone. He has equalled my expectation, having given me courage and strength in hope against hope to endure all. Now, since I have been informed of the sentence and admonished to prepare for the end of my long and weary pilgrimage I beg to return thanks for these happy tidings. I will accuse no one. May I pardon with a sincere heart every one even as I desire forgiveness. But I know that you, more than any one, ought to feel the dishonour of your own blood and that of a Queen and a King's daughter.

"Then, Madam, for the sake of Jesus to whose name all powers bow, I require you to ordain that when my enemies have slaked their black thirst for my innocent blood you will permit my desolate servants to carry away my corpse and bury it in holy ground with the other Queens of France, having this in recollection that in Scotland the bodies of the Kings my predecessors have been outraged and the churches profaned and abolished.

"Do not refuse me this last request—that you will permit free sepulchre to this body when the soul is separated, which when united could never obtain liberty to live in repose such as you would procure for yourself. Against which peace (before God I speak) I never aimed a blow, but God will let you see the truth of all after my death.

"And because I dread the tyranny of those to whom you have abandoned me I entreat you not to permit that I be slain without your knowledge. This is not from fear of the torment, which I am most ready to suffer, but on account of the reports (of suicide) which will be raised and without other witnesses than those who inflict it.

"One jewel that I received of you I shall return to you with my last words, or sooner if you please. Once more I supplicate you to permit me to send a jewel and last adieu to my son.

"In the name of Jesus Christ and in respect of our kinship, and for the sake of King Henry VII your grandfather and mine, and by the honour of the dignity that we both hold, and our common sex I implore you to grant these requests.

"As for the rest I think you know that in your name they have taken down my canopy and dais, but afterwards owned to me that it was not by your commandment. I thank God that this wickedness came not from you. They told me 'I was a mere dead woman incapable of dignities.' I would wish that all my papers were brought to you without reserve that at last it may be manifest to you that the care of your safety was not confined to those who are so prompt to persecute me.

"Yet while abandoning this world and preparing myself for a better I must remind you that one day you will have to answer for your charge and for all those you doom, and I desire that my blood and my country may be remembered at that time. For why? From the first days of our capacity to comprehend our duties we should bend our minds to make the things of this world yield to those of eternity.

From Fotheringhay,
Your Sister and Cousin, Prisoner Wrongfully,
Mary R."

But though these words drew tears from Elizabeth's haggard eyes they could not move the men who drove her on and their bitterness was a fire to scorch them dry. She was half mad with panic and indecision—herself caught in the torrent hurling on to the abyss in a mighty swirl from which she could not escape if she would. The Nemesis of long cruelty and deceit was at her heels and for her there was no salvation; her own treacheries collared her neck and bound her hand and foot.

She swore by the passion of God, to her Spirit and Moon and Davidson, the junta of three who shared her confidence that she never could or would risk it. Yet she must have Mary's death. And what follows is the assertion of those three men as to the manner in which it was ensured.

The day came in her cabinet at Hampton Court when with set lips but the jaunty hardness that she assumed in her most dangerous moments she spoke her mind to the three, at first carelessly, a non-committal manner that she could recede from if they took it ill.

"Sir Amyas Paulet and Sir Drue Drury are excellent gaolers for this pest of a woman. They keep her safely clapped up. Yet they have no pity and understanding of their Sovereign's difficulty, no wish to help her at however little cost to themselves, and the earning of my undying gratitude. Consider, Cecil! Here is the French Ambassador pleading for her life in the name of the French Queen and King. I have told them my own is not safe while she lives and plots my death, and they care nothing. Why should they, the brute beasts? My own ministers care nothing! And there is Melville stirring up the King of Scotland for his mother. I am beset with raging difficulties, and of those the greatest is to sign the warrant for her execution. And Paulet and Drury could deliver me and will not! Well—let be! Let them go their way. I hope I know how to die!"

"As how, Madam?" Burleigh asked seriously, but his lips also paled, and his heart beat a quick measure under his velvet doublet. He, Walsingham, and Davidson shot one swift glance at each other and looked away. They also knew, but not one would relieve the Queen of this too delicate difficulty. She was an old woman now—well over fifty. When she smiled, which was seldom, black decaying teeth showed through harshly reddened lips. Life had used her hardly and she showed it. Deep wrinkles were carved in her face, and her small dark eyes glittered with brittle lights through a spider's web of wrinkles that netted the skin. Her hawk's nose was the beak of a bird of prey and the leanness of her throat seen above the falling ruff gave it a vulturine air uncontradicted by the greediness of thin working lips. Her looking-glasses were destroyed that she might not see the ruin she felt. She did not know that sometimes her women revenged themselves for her fits of fury by painting her face and eyebrows grotesquely when she was not preparing for a public appearance. They had done it to-day with a few artful touches, praising her beauty unctuously, and the result was dreadful, the stark

reality of her rage bursting like lightning through a grotesque mask that belied it.

The three looked at her silently, realizing that her death might any day change the whole position of the actors in this great tragedy. Yet, even so, they had taken her side against Mary and could hope nothing from her. For their safety she must die and Elizabeth live, until they had made their own of James of Scotland. Their only hope.

Davidson put in smoothly: "And what answer did Your Majesty return to Melville? The fool always puts the Scots Queen first. As if she had not long ceased to be his Sovereign!"

Elizabeth turned on him venomously. She had never had much self-control, and age had sapped what there was of it.

"Little man, little man, you speak shameful truth! If my subjects loved me as hers love her I should not be in this bitter strait this day! He told me that he offered the promise of her son and all the Scots nobles that if the said Queen were delivered up to them she would renounce in favour of her son all right to the English throne. And they offered the pledge of the King of France and all the other princes that this should be so, and they would themselves keep her in safe custody with her political life ended. To this they pledged their honour."

Walsingham shook his head, smiling thinly.

"Your Majesty's wisdom cannot accept this offer—most certainly it cannot! Who can trust their word? And she is still possessed—even at forty-four—of that deadly witchcraft which causes men to madden at the sight of her. If she were old and wrinkled——"

That touched Elizabeth on a cruelly tender point.

"By God's death, she shall never live to be that," she cried. "But what a case is mine? I am to refuse this offer of France, I am to be the bloody executioner. Is there no man will rid me of her privately? When Henry the Second called on his Barons to rid him of Becket they rode within the hour to Canterbury and despatched him with their battle-axes!"

Silence, and the three watching each other's faces with cautious darting glances. She sprang from her chair and

paced to and fro swiftly, all rising to their feet with down-dropped eyes, and standing stiffly.

"Letters from the King of Scotland, from France, from Spain, enough to drive a woman mad, and nothing—nothing done for me! I will write—no you, Walsingham, shall write to Paulet and Drury. They must act like Englishmen and save me and the country with me. Bring paper, ink—now! The thing can wait no longer. I have already written to Paulet praising his fidelity. Read this copy and attune your letter by it."

The others read it over his shoulder. It ran thus:

"Amyas,

My most faithful and careful servant, God reward you treble-fold for your most troublesome charge so well discharged. If you knew, my Amyas, how kindly besides most dutifully, my grateful heart accepts and prizes your spotless endeavours and faultless actions it would ease your toils and rejoice your heart, in which place this thought that I cannot balance the value at which I prize you. If I do not reward such merits let me suffer when I have most need of you! Let your wicked murderess know how her vile deserts compel these orders and bid her ask God forgiveness for her treacherous dealings towards me, the saviour of her life for many a year. Let repentance take place, and let not the fiend possess her so that her soul may not be lost, for which I pray with hands lifted up to Him who can both save and spill. With my most loving adieu and prayer for your long life your most faithful and loving Sovereign."

While she looked moodily at the floor they read her thoughts with her letter in the sharpness of fear. They knew! Not a hint to implicate herself if her desire was fulfilled, but a wide door open to her for the condemnation of her instrument. She would have her scapegoats. Yet they too knew that there was no retreat for themselves.

Burleigh spoke: "Madam, she must die. Your precious life is not otherwise to be safeguarded. But better face the world with our righteous cause and a warrant for her execution and——"

Elizabeth literally spat at him—not a unique gesture with her. He took it like a slave. To her face they never defied her, however they outwitted her behind her back.

"By God's death and my eternal hope I will not do it. You shall send this letter to Paulet and follow it with one wherein he can read my meaning. I charge you write."

They evaded, argued, but she would have it. She cried aloud: "Strike lest we be stricken!"—a word she had the way of muttering to herself now. She towered over them like her terrible father when his eyes flashed mortal hatred. Panic and wrath made her more or less than human and they feared for their lives. All they dared do was to implicate her in the letter they wrote, so that every word was from her, and that trick she dared not disown at the moment, but left her means of escape for later study knowing that Paulet would not act unless her will was clear. She had found her men ready enough with suggestion, as when Leicester wrote proposing "the sure and silent operation of poison;" but, skilled as he was said to be in that art, neither he nor any other was willing to risk his own skin against the backwash of her repentance. She thought it dastardly. Pecks of protestation but no action.

"Now your letter!" she said, and sat tapping her nails on the table while Walsingham wrote officially to Amyas Paulet and Drue Drury, and at the end Walsingham and Davidson signed it. Burleigh stood out of it with *finesse* they could not combat. And thus it ran:

> "After our hearty commendation, we find by a speech lately made by Her Majesty that she notes in you both a want of that zeal for her service that she looks for, because you have not in this long time of yourselves found out some way of shortening the life of the Scots Queen, considering the great peril to which our Queen is hourly subject so long as she lives. In this, beside want of love to herself, she wonders greatly that you have no care for the preservation of religion and the public good, especially having such good ground for the satisfaction of your consciences towards God. And therefore she takes it most unkindly that men, professing the love to her that you do, should cast the burden upon her knowing as you do her

dislike to shed blood. These respects, we find, trouble Her Majesty greatly, who protests that if the danger of her good subjects did not move her more than her own peril she would never be drawn to shedding blood. We thought it proper to acquaint you with these speeches lately uttered by Her Majesty referring the same to your judgments. And so we commit you to the protection of the Almighty. Your most assured friends,

Francis Walsingham, William Davidson."

"It is not good but it must serve," Elizabeth said almost exhausted by the scene, and half collapsed in her chair as the others faced her silently. They went out silently also, and she sat alone staring out into the February day with its bitter wind and whirling dust-devils. For her too winter had darkened down and she beheld no promise of spring.

The letters went as she directed, though Davidson in terror after the second had gone, sent a mounted messenger flying after it with passionate instruction to Sir Amyas to burn that most dangerous letter "like a heretic at the stake." What in God's name would he answer, what do—the sour-faced serious Amyas Paulet who soothed his conscience by persecuting Mary with all his power as her jailer? Would he take the great step? And if so, how long would his own step be from Elizabeth's favour to the headsman's block? Yet she might—she *might* reward him secretly but greatly. Who could calculate her moods?

Swiftly, in the ride and return of the messenger to the prison of Fotheringhay Castle, came the answer of Sir Amyas to Walsingham. He sent it on to Davidson who professed himself to be ill.

"Sir,

Your letter of yesterday coming to my hand this present day I would not fail to return my answer with all possible speed, which I shall deliver to you in great grief and bitterness of mind that I am so unhappy as to live to see this unhappy day in which I am required by direction from my most gracious Sovereign to do a deed which God and the law forbid.

My goods and life are at Her Majesty's disposal, but

God forbid I should make so foul a shipwreck of my conscience or leave so great a blot to my poor posterity as to shed blood without law or warrant. Trusting that Her Majesty of her accustomed clemency and your good mediation will take this my answer in good part I do commit you to the mercy of the Almighty. Your most assured poor friend, A. Paulet.

P.S.—Your letters coming in the plural number seem to be meant for Sir Drue Drury as for myself. Because he is not named in them he forbears to make any particular answer but subscribes in heart to my opinion."

This postscript was signed "Drue Drury."

Hopeless! Quaking, Davidson took it to Elizabeth in the long gallery where she paced up and down for exercise in the cold February weather, a mantle of white fur about her lean shoulders. She read it and flung it aside lashing herself into another of her rages. They came on so often now that those who could fled like mice when they see the cat upon them.

"The fools! The traitors! That precise fellow Paulet! And who is he to set up his dainty conscience against his Queen's and nation's good? Since he will be damned anyhow it had as well be for a sheep as a lamb!"

He dared say nothing. The position was incredibly difficult and dangerous, and a word in the wrong direction might ruin them all. She raged over the letter.

"Amyas Paulet—that calls himself a faithful servant—the scoundrel! Ready in words but useless when deeds need doing. What servants, what servants! But I will find those who will do it and shame Paulet and Drury. I am not Queen of England for nothing."

Suddenly she fell into passionate angry sobbing, dry as her heart, no tears running down the channels of her wrinkles.

"It is shame—damnable shame to my ministers and Privy Council that I can find none to rid me of this toad, this foul blot and leprosy upon my life and reign!"

She sat in this paroxysm for awhile, spasmodic contractions running over her face which she had lost all power of controlling, then called for wine, drank a little and strode

up and down the gallery her farthingale billowing as she went, her lips moving in the sore struggle between hate and conscience. Davidson watched his chance until she passed him again turning violently, and stepped to her shoulder.

"Madam, sign the warrant for her death. She is a bosom serpent. The Kings will make little ado once she is dead. And dead women do not bite!"

They had drawn out the warrant six weeks before, and he laid it again before her but she shuddered away from it. "Never, never!" and dropped into her chair a defeated woman, motioning him off with a wild gesture of rejection. For six weeks she had flung it away and would not, would not! Battling against them and terror, her face haggard with long temptation.

Suddenly this day, according to Davidson, her mood changed as a weather-vane swings on a great wind.

> "It pleased her with the best disposition and unwillingness to sign. After, she commanded me to carry it to the Seal. And her pleasure was that I should also visit Mr. Secretary (Walsingham then being sick) 'because his grief at it,' as she merrily said, 'would go near to kill him outright,' then taking occasion to repeat to me some reasons why she had deferred the matter so long, namely that the world might see she had not been violently or maliciously drawn to it."

This is the scene of which Davidson alone could bear witness. True or untrue? God knows! Man can never know. Later she protested her signature a forgery, but from lips so steeped in lies as those of the four, what can be accepted? Only circumstantial evidence is to be believed.

To Burleigh and Walsingham the attainment of this end meant confirmation in their wealth and safety. To him also, the creature Leicester it meant the same, for Leicester was deep in the plot for her death. But what if her storm-tossed will should change again to delay? Could he dare to put all beyond doubt by acting instantly upon the warrant? She had named no day, and yet—she might live

to thank him with great rewards if he had forced her hand.

He stood long plunged in thought, lost to all the world but that one desperate dread. Then, slowly and with heavy steps left the room, the warrant in his bosom.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON the 7th day of February late in the evening the Earls of Shrewsbury and Kent attended by Mr. Secretary Beale reached Fotheringhay and asked for the prisoner. Her answer was that she was ill and preparing for rest, when they retorted that their business would not bear delay, and instantly she called for a mantle and seating herself in a chair at the foot of her bed attended by her ladies received them with courtesy. Shrewsbury briefly announced her sentence, and the warrant decorated with the Great Seal was read to her by Beale.

He added with unction : " Madam, I admonish you to dispose and hold yourself ready to-morrow morning to suffer the execution of the sentence of death."

She listened, bowing her head, and crossed herself, saying with serene fortitude : " In the name of God these tidings are welcome, and I bless and praise Him that the end of my bitter sufferings is at hand. I did not at one time think the Queen my sister would have consented to my death, but God's will be done. He is my witness that I render up my spirit with a pure heart and clear conscience before His Divine Majesty."

Listening in amazement they reported of her to Burleigh that she seemed not to be in any terror but rather with smiling cheer to accept the admonition. She then asked what time was appointed.

" To-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

With her ladies and servants weeping about her she asked for a few more hours that she might make her will and provide for them and others, not as desiring it for herself but rather as willing to be gone.

Shrewsbury refused the request roughly. " No, no, Madam. It is not in our power. You must die to-morrow at the hour we have named."

She accepted the refusal with the same serenity, and when they offered her a minister of the Reformed Church and refused a priest of her own—a mercy for which she had been led to hope—put the offer by with tranquil dignity. Then turning to her weeping servants she smiled.

"Up, up, Jane Kennedy! Leave weeping and be doing, for the time is short. Did I not tell you it would come to this? Blessed be God it is here and fear and sorrow ended!"

Then, still smiling she reminded her ladies how her uncle the Duc de Guise had told her, and she but a girl, that he would swear she would know how to die like a soldier of her race, "And this," she said, "I trust shall be seen."

Among them she then divided what money she had into portions to reward all her attendants and defray their return to France and this done they supped together, and for the last time she pledged them and they her, drinking their tears with the wine. Surely they would have despaired but for the sweet consolations and strength this poor princess gave them in her own extremity. Then, having divided her little possessions among them (and little they were, for nearly all had been robbed from her) she wrote her will and this being done begged her ladies to watch and pray continually with her until an hour or two past midnight when she desired to lie awhile upon her bed, being very weary and having done with this world even to the choosing of a fair handkerchief with which she desired Jane Kennedy to bandage her eyes upon the scaffold, where she desired to appear with strength and calm though sorely crippled with rheumatism. Thus she lay with her ladies about her, her eyes closed and lips moving in silent prayer. This they remembered and recorded, to whom her every motion was precious and not to be passed over while life lasted.

At six o'clock in the morning she rose and commanded them to dress her as for a festival, that, as a great Queen should, she might pass undaunted to her death with all dignity and ceremony, and even her dress be memorable. She wore a long robe of black satin starred with gold and beneath it an under-dress of crimson velvet that when the upper dress was discarded she might appear still robed

before the people. Over her coif fell a transparent white veil to the ground. At the girdle hung her beads. Then statelier and more beautiful than they had ever seen her, with the unearthly beauty of death in her eyes and the bright flush on her cheeks, she turned to her ladies and spoke with deep earnestness and pleading.

"Very soon I shall be incapable of thinking of this poor body or caring for it. O then, for the love of our blessed Saviour, care for it, cover it, and do not abandon me under the hands of the executioner."

Sobbing, they promised to protect her dignity and modesty. "And now I must be alone for I have a great deed to do and a great prayer to make," and so speaking left them and entered her little oratory.

Who can tell what thoughts filled her in that hour—what aspirations, what strange and glorious consolations? For, foreseeing the bitter strait which had befallen, that no priest might be near to offer her the last ministrations of her Church, the Head of that Church on earth, the Pope, had sent her the holy wafer consecrated by his own sacred hand, with a great and mighty dispensation never before given to one of the laity, that the desolate Queen might administer it to herself in her heavy need. Therefore the blessed Saviour Himself sustained her, and of His Passion she partook in her own, and peace and bliss unspeakable inspired her from the Source.

Then with glory not of this earth upon her discrowned brows she returned, shining with the dawn of another world, and thus earnestly desired them to join her for the last time in prayer. Now even as they knelt the High Sheriff beat upon her door to summon her, and the Castle clock struck eight.

Fifteen minutes more they granted to prayer, and that being told on the hour-glass by its hastening sands, Shrewsbury and Kent and Sir Amyas Paulet with others knocked again. The little company within still knelt bowed in prayer and the Sheriff entered and spoke faltering, for his heart failed him.

"Madam, I am sent for you."

Then with the help of her good physician Bourgoigne she rose from her knees and taking an ivory crucifix, the emblem of the Passion in her hand, and leaning on Bourgoigne and

one of her men-servants she said with good cheer: "Yes, let us go," and so entered upon the last of her griefs.

At the door the two men halted, and Bourgoigne spoke in a broken voice and with tears: "Madam, we will do you any service. With you we will gladly die, but to death we cannot lead you. Our hearts refuse to endure it."

She smiled: "You are right," and turning to the Sheriff: "My servants will not lead me to death—yet walk without help I cannot. My limbs are crippled with illness."

He gave a signal, and two of Sir Amyas Paulet's servants advancing supported her, the Lords rudely bidding her own people stand back for they should go no further.

But this she would not allow, saying earnestly: "I conjure you that these poor afflicted servants of mine may be present with me at my death."

And unlike a gentleman of England Kent refused the Queen, saying harshly: "Madam, it cannot be granted. They would not stick to put some superstitious trumpery into practice, if it were but dipping their handkerchiefs in Your Grace's blood."

She answered with majesty: "My Lord, I will give my word, though it be but dead that they shall do none of these things. And I hope your Mistress, being a maiden Queen, will vouchsafe for the sake of womanhood that I shall have some of my own women about me at my death"—and seeing that she could not gain her request she broke into most womanly tears, saying: "I am cousin to your Queen and descended from the blood-royal of Henry the Seventh, and I am a married Queen of France and anointed Queen of Scotland, and this is refused me."

So at last for shame's sake they granted that she might choose two of her women and four men, and at the door of the Hall waited the true Andrew Melville to kneel before her in great anguish of soul, and she said softly: "Weep no more, my good and faithful servant, but rather rejoice that you shall now see the end of my long troubles," and so sent by him her last blessing to her son, and this being done she bestowed upon his long fidelity the guerdon of a kiss and so went forward undaunted.

For the honour of England let it be told also how Sir

William Fitzwilliam, owner of the Castle of Fotheringhay, knelt to kiss her hand deploring that her blood should thus be cruelly shed beneath his roof, and she, accepting his sorrow as a friend's, thanked him graciously and offered him as a remembrance of his courtesy the portrait of her son then hanging beside her bed, being her last earthly possession.

And again she went forward.

So entering the Hall she was led to the scaffold, raised and railed, and the block draped with black, and a chair. And because she could not ascend it Sir Amyas Paulet took her hand to aid her, she saying: "Sir, I thank you. This is the last trouble I shall give you." She seated herself with an earl on either hand, and the Commission for her execution being read aloud she heard it with smiling calm.

Yet even then they could not let her be, but intruded upon her the Protestant Dean of Peterborough who exhorted her lengthily to put aside her superstitions. But she, not regarding the man, prayed softly, naming by name her cousin Elizabeth the Queen, forgiving her and all for wrongs done; and then rising addressed herself to death, summoning her two women to disrobe her. So this they did, laying aside her satin gown and ruff and presently she stood up tall and stately before them all, clothed in crimson. And her two ladies knelt for her last blessing and Jane Kennedy bound her eyes with the handkerchief prepared, and she and her companion wept aloud in such grief as cannot be told, clasping the Queen's robe and clinging to her.

Therefore she laid her finger upon her lips saying: "Friends, do not weep. I have promised for you." And being so compelled by the English lords they withdrew from the scaffold hiding their faces from what must follow, and the executioners guided her to the block and there, kneeling alone, life receding swiftly like a dream at dawn, she bowed her head upon it in the name of Him who also endured His Passion, saying her last words: "*In manus Tuas*"—Into Thy hands—and no more.

Now a shudder like a sob ran throughout the assembly of English gentlemen who had gathered to see her die, for her nobility exalted their hearts to God. Even Earl Shrewsbury in raising his baton for signal turned away his face

and covered it with his hand to hide his tears. And the executioner striking released her.

Three blows were needed for this butcher's work, before the butcher held up her head to the assembly, shouting: "God save Queen Elizabeth."

"And so may all her enemies perish!" added the Dean of Peterborough.

But there was no answer from any other present, excepting only the official Amen from the Earl of Kent, for many were in tears nor could any triumph.

Then the ladies were hurried from her and the base-born executioners plundered her body of whatever they judged of value. Yet let none mourn, for love had not deserted her but clung to her to the end. Nor was she alone upon the blood-drenched scaffold as her enemies would have chosen. Her little Scots terrier following her unseen, clung to her as she knelt to die, hiding himself in the folds of her garments and was found there still clinging to her body and moaning aloud in grief for his beloved. Some wretch endeavoured to force him to lap her blood that the parallel with Jezebel might be complete for Elizabeth's justification, and when he shuddered away, still moaning, flung him out to his fate—best so, for a broken heart brought him release—he like his Queen having done with a world emptied of all love and pity. And so he never more touched food but creeping into solitude, died, faithful to death and beyond.

Is it worth while to write of Elizabeth's asseverations that she had never meant this death?—that she had not signed the warrant, indeed would never have ordered the execution; to rehearse her parade of grief, the ruin inflicted on Davidson whom she avouched had sent it to the Earls by stealth? It is of small importance. None can tell, but if so her Lords had dared as never men yet. In that jungle of deception and base trickery who can know? The grimace of pompous funeral rites at Peterborough for her who in life had known no peace—these were Elizabeth's reparation.

Better forget these things. They do not trouble the realities of life and death. In France where they had loved her, a more sincere funeral service was held at Notre Dame where the Archbishop of Bourges spoke of that lost beauty in

words to be remembered. And as this book began with her praises in the land she loved so it may well end, for there are none better.

"When I see your faces thus bathed in tears and hear your sighs and sobs in the silence, I doubt whether I should not myself keep silence. Yet must I speak of her youth among us, of her endowments of which it is not easy to find so many centred in one human being, for besides that marvellous beauty which attracted all the world she had a nature so excellent, an understanding so clear and judgment so sound as to be rarely paralleled by her age and sex, and an undaunted courage tempered by the most womanly sweetness. Many of us saw in this Church where we are now assembled to lament her, this Queen on the day of her bridal, so covered with jewels that the sun himself did not shine more brightly, so beautiful, so lovely, as never yet was woman. These walls were then hung with cloth of gold. Who could then have imagined we should see her a prisoner who had given liberty to prisoners; poor, who gave generously to others, treated with contempt by those she had made great, and finally the axe of a base executioner mangling the form of her who was doubly a Queen, and that beauty which was a world's wonder fading in a dreary prison! O vanity of human greatness! Marble, bronze, and iron shall pass, but the memory of her great example shall live."

Thus Elizabeth in that long duel had won her victory and in its winning the whole world shuddered from her. That too passed, and none knows what she hid in her heart until her own miserable end, deserted and betrayed by those who worshipped the rising sun of James of Scotland, sitting for days of doting wretchedness, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her finger in her mouth, an aged doll tumbling into ruin, a picture of senile misery. Death was kinder to Mary Stuart, he also her lover, visiting her in splendour, shining eternal and dazzling men's eyes. For ever she lives in the world's heart, loveliest, most unhappy, in a glory spiritual yet shot with the red flame of human and most womanly passion, half saint, half queen of men, for ever most royal, immortally lovely.

The two lie almost side by side in the great quiet of Westminster. Do the things which troubled them seem any

longer worth a flicker of passion to either ? Are they sure which lost, which won ? Have they joined hands and smiled together at the toys of royalty, once worth such rivers of blood and tears ?

Who can tell ! For the fashion of this world passeth away but the things that are eternal abide.

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis and Son, Limited,
The Trinity Press, Worcester.

F20.930